Assyrian Collective Identity in the Second Millennium BCE:
A Social Categories Approach

By

Jonathan Valk

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Professor Beate Pongratz-Leisten

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Dedication

To the two most important women in my life: my mother Tamara, and my wife Avichag. In thinking of either of them I can do no less than echo the praise of the goddess Nanaya:

ela šâša, mannu mīna eppuš?

Without her, who can do anything?

- SAA III, 4: r ii 9'

Acknowledgements

This project represents not the culmination of a long journey, but an important waystation on the road. The path has been muddy and riddled with potholes. It has, on occasion, been lost altogether, only to reappear in an unexpected place, meandering in an unanticipated direction. Nevertheless, הנני – here I am! – with my offering in hand. I first set out on this journey many rotations around the sun ago. When I left the safety of the maternal nest, I had only just begun to realize that I do not know much. Now, I am acutely aware of it. All to the better.

My awareness of my own ignorance has been helped along by many people whom I have been fortunate to know and to learn from. Before moving to New York and deciding to pursue research in the ancient world, I had the opportunity to work closely with Martin Goodman and Bernard Wasserstein at the universities of Oxford and Chicago respectively. Both of them pointed the way to better, sharper, more critical thinking. In Chicago, too, Seth Richardson helped spark an Assyriological fire in my mind. It was some time before this fire turned into a blaze, but when it did it was Seth's kindness that helped me find *terra firma*. In the interim, I spent a number of years outside of the academy, trying my hand at other things and doing away with any outstanding doubts about what it was I wanted to do. The Švejkian experience of military service was instructional, if only in how not to think; the same is true of my taste of a political world uninterested in self-reflection and the common good. The

incomparable turn in my life, however, was the birth of my eldest daughter, and my subsequent undertaking to follow Siduri's sage advice: *ṣubbi ṣeḫram ṣābitu qātīka, marḫītum liḫtaddâm ina sūnīka* (gaze upon the little one who holds your hand, let a wife enjoy your repeated embrace).[1] An academic context struck me as precisely the right one in which to live by those words.

I will always be grateful to New York University's Institute for the Study of the Ancient World for giving me the opportunity and freedom to do what I wanted to do, and for paying me to do it. The six years I have been at ISAW are the longest time I have ever spent in a single place. ISAW has become a home away from home, and I could not have hoped for a more pleasant sojourn. From the regular provision of peerless victuals to the company of colleagues, ISAW has been good to me. I thank its staff and the community collectively. Individually, I gratefully acknowledge Marc LeBlanc, who has worked assiduously to help me with every manner of administrative obstacle, and Gabriel McKee, who has gone out of his way to provide me with whatever obscure books and articles I have needed. I am especially indebted to the steadfast generosity and support of David Ratzan, who is ever ready to help me, and to follow it up with a kind word or three.

ISAW's visiting scholars are a tremendous asset, and I have enjoyed and profited from their presence. Although I am thankful to many of them, from the point of view of the dissertation and its associated travails I must single out Eva von Dassow, Gina Konstantopoulos,

[1] As per Andrew George's edition and translation of the Old Babylonian Sippar Tablet in George 2003: 278-279.

Emily Cole, Yitzchak Jaffe, and above all Martin Worthington. Martin was kind enough to read drafts of some of the material that follows and to provide characteristically valuable commentary. Knowing him is an unqualified delight. I have enjoyed and profited in equal measure from the friendship and collegiality of my fellow students at ISAW and in other departments at NYU. There is a long list of names, which I refrain from reproducing here for fear of inadvertently missing anyone. The omission of this list in no way diminishes my fondness for the people who populate it. You have my thanks. I do, however, single out two people. Georgios Tsolakis, for help with Greek – ευχαριστώ! And Nancy Highcock, who has been a welcome partner in the race to completion: trouble shared is trouble halved.

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confidence in my work, supported me throughout, and is an outstanding guide in Assyriology. Thank you.

Being a father to three munchkins aged six and under is the great delight of my life. All that I do is inflected by the thought of my children. Fatherhood does, however, present certain logistical challenges in the context of writing a dissertation. I count myself exceptionally fortunate to have been able to call on loved ones, who helped me make time when it was in short supply. In chronological order, my mother-in-law Xavière Hassan, my mother Tamara Fai, my brother-in-law Samuel Claus, and my father Ferdinand Valk each visited New York separately to take over some of my domestic duties. My in-laws also took in my family for a considerable time, allowing me to finish everything as deadlines loomed. Beyond the production of time, my mother and father offered their thoughts and comments on drafts of each chapter of this work, improving the final product and giving me the confidence to keep at it. There is no end to my love and gratitude for them.

None of this would have been possible without my loved ones. It is by my parents, my brothers and their families, and my family by marriage that I know my place in the world. It is their approval that I seek, their support that I lean on, and to them that I return. But it is with my wife Avichag and my three daughters that I share my life most intimately. Nothing makes me happier than the love of my children, Aya, Nava, and Sequoia. It is with them in mind that I have come to be where I am today, and I hope that they may one day take pride in this work.

My wife Avi is a great blessing. She is an unrivaled companion, a marvelous mother to our children, and simply a wonderful human being. Her keen eye has read drafts of this dissertation and helped improve it, she has sacrificed endless hours to facilitate its creation, and any success is hers as much as it is mine. Odysseus's words ring true:

> οὐ μὲν γὰρ τοῦ γε κρεῖσσον καὶ ἄρειον, ἢ ὅθ᾽ ὁμοφρονέοντε νοήμασιν οἶκον ἔχητον
> ἀνὴρ ἠδὲ γυνή· πόλλ᾽ ἄλγεα δυσμενέεσσι, χάρματα δ᾽ εὐμενέτῃσι, μάλιστα δέ τ᾽ ἔκλυον
> αὐτοί.
>
> For there is nothing better than when a man and a woman share their home, united in purpose and mind. A source of hardship to their enemies, a source of joy to their friends, their own best claim to glory.
>
> - *The Odyssey*, 6.182-185

Abstract

Assyrians are attested as a social category throughout the second millennium BCE. Although this category is often regarded as ethnic and unchanging, a closer examination of the evidence indicates that what it meant to be Assyrian underwent a radical transformation in this time. Interpreting the Assyrian social category through the modern paradigm of ethnicity obscures much more than it enlightens. To understand the changing form and function of the Assyrian social category in the second millennium, the present dissertation instead develops a broad theoretical framework for the study of collective identity that focuses on the role of categories in structuring the social landscape. This framework – termed the social categories approach – builds on current research from various fields of inquiry, outlining how and why collective identities develop out of categories. It also elucidates how and why such categories and their attendant identities are inseparable from the creation and perpetuation of inequalities in the social world. The application of the social categories approach to the Assyrian evidence from the second millennium illuminates the dynamic character of the Assyrian social category and its relationship to the social worlds in which it operated. It also enables a more profound understanding of how Assyrians conceived of themselves that is unburdened by the conceptual baggage of the modern ethnic paradigm, and thus more sensitive to the construction of idiosyncratic social boundaries and their relationship to prevailing conditions.

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Note on Transliteration

Wherever primary texts are cited, they are rendered both in transliterated (normalized) Akkadian and in English translation. The purpose of this dual rendition of texts is to present my interpretation of the meaning and grammar of the Akkadian in full. It also allows those with knowledge of Akkadian and those without to engage with the material in its most accessible form. Although normalization obscures the cuneiform signs that inform the reconstruction of the text, it enables a fuller and more immediate appreciation of the language that the cuneiform represents. To maximize fluency, I only indicate breaks or partially preserved signs when these cannot be securely reconstructed. Should questions or doubts arise concerning any normalized Akkadian, the reader need only consult the references for a full edition of the cuneiform texts, or for copies and photographs of the texts if they have not yet been edited.

The reader should not look for consistency in the normalization of Akkadian. I normalize Akkadian on the basis of the cuneiform signs in any given text. In both Old and Middle Assyrian sources, Assyrian grammatical forms coexist with Babylonian grammatical forms, and there are often other idiosyncrasies. Instead of altering the forms indicated by the cuneiform signs to impose an artificial dialectical and grammatical consistency, I normalize Babylonianisms in Assyrian texts accordingly, and preserve other oddities as they appear. Where there is room for doubt, or where logograms are involved, I tend to normalize according to the conventions of

the dialect of the text. In this way, the logogram DUMU (son) is normalized as *mer'um* in Old Assyrian texts, but as *māru* in the Babylonianized inscriptions of Middle Assyrian kings.

1. Introduction

In fitting the past to the present's frame we risk merely revealing the present as it already knows itself to be.

- Bruce Routledge, The antiquity of the nation? Critical reflections from the ancient Near East[1]

1.1 The Problem

Two men, divided by about seven centuries. One is named Iddin-Aššur,[2] the other is named Aššur-iddin.[3] Their lives are rooted in the same northern Mesopotamian city, Aššur. They worship the same god, Aššur. They are both prominent officials in political systems based in Aššur. They appear to speak a language that has changed only a little with the passage of time,[4] Assyrian. What are we to make of these two men? The question is not as simple as it seems. It is easy to look at the similarities between them and to say that they both form part of

[1] Routledge 2003: 229.
[2] As per Larsen 2015: 125, Iddin-Aššur was an important priest (*kumrum*) who served as *līmum* official. According to the chronological scheme of Barjamovic, Hertel, and Larsen 2011: Appendix 1, Iddin-Aššur's year of *līmum* service was 1949 BCE.
[3] Aššur-iddin served as Grand Vizier in the 13th century, for which see Cancik-Kirschbaum 1999: 220 and Jakob 2013: 511ff.
[4] For Old Assyrian, see most recently Kouwenberg 2017. For Middle Assyrian, see Mayer 1971 and the recent dissertation de Ridder 2015.

the same tradition, that they are “Assyrian”. And this is broadly true: Iddin-Aššur and Aššur-iddin are both Assyrian on some level. Throughout the second millennium BCE, texts identify people in relation to Aššur. Translations of such texts, as well as discussions of them in secondary literature, habitually refer to such people as Assyrians. They are not wrong to do so. But when we stop for a moment to think about what this means, we quickly run into trouble. What are we saying when we identify the two men with the same label? What does it mean to be Assyrian, and do we really imagine that it should mean the same thing over the better part of a millennium?

These are difficult questions, and they have analogues in the study of any society. Our attempt to answer them will depend, of course, on an examination of the relevant evidence. Like all ancient evidence, the material that we have at our disposal is problematic. There are no contemporary disquisitions on the meaning of Assyrianness, and we have no subjects whom we can interview or poll. Relative to many other ancient societies, however, the evidence we do have is incredibly rich. We have tens of thousands of texts inscribed in clay and stone, including letters, contracts, administrative documents, and royal inscriptions; we have texts written by Assyrians, and texts written about them; we have texts relating to different social strata and meeting different social needs; and we have a rich material record from excavated sites. There is enough here to offer more than a superficial answer to the questions we will ask about the Assyrians. It is nevertheless important to point out that the shape of the present project is

dictated by the uneven availability of the evidence. In the second millennium, there are two great periods in which Assyrian textual production flourishes, divided by about two centuries of almost total silence. At either end of that silence are the Old and Middle Assyrian periods, which will be the subjects of our analysis. Given the right interpretative lens, the Assyrian category in both periods should be brought into sharp relief.

Which brings us to a broader problem of methodology and theory. Before we proceed to an examination of the evidence, we need to establish how a category like "Assyrian" works. Such categories are too often left unexamined. We see them, and we think we know what they are. When we encounter Assyrians in our texts, it is tempting to imagine them in familiar terms, as an ethnic group or proto-nation, a community bound by blood, land, language, and maybe even an anthem and a flag. Well, perhaps no anthem and flag, but it is hard to disentangle what is anachronistic from what is useful when we adopt modern ways of dividing the social space and transpose them to the past – or, indeed, to modern societies with different modes of social organization. If we approach the Assyrian category without an appropriate critical framework, it can too easily function as a blank screen on which we project our expectations.[5] The result is either that we examine the evidence through a distorting lens, or that we talk about it without

[5] This dynamic is described by Geary 2015: 11-12, in response to Anthony D. Smith's arguments about finding *ethnies* in the past: "Social scientists look for ethnic groups, and not surprisingly find them. Where, after all, would ethnography be without *ethnie* to investigate? This more specifically means that in the context of historical research into ethnicity, the discovery in our sources of a vocabulary that seems *prima facie* to resonate with our (or Smith's) assumptions of what an *ethnie* is supposed to be will be taken as evidence of its actual existence."

any real concept of what it is we're talking about. Neither is good: we want to make sure that we have the right lens. We need a theoretical framework that will allow us to make sense of our evidence on its own terms.

Given the prodigious quantities of ink that have been devoted to the subject of social groups and collective identities, why not adopt an existing framework? Humans everywhere are divided into groups, sorted and labelled according to different criteria. Different intellectual climates have produced different approaches to the investigation of social division. This is apparent from even the most cursory survey of the intellectual output of the last two centuries. In the age of the nation state, the world has been regarded as one of nations;[6] in the era of industrialization, some have seen an unending divide between classes (in the words of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, "the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles");[7] in the time of the triumph of European imperialism, the world has been viewed as one of races; amid the rising multiculturalism of the post-Second World War West, the world has been apprehended as a world of ethnicities; in the post-Cold War vision of Samuel Huntington, the world is one of civilizations.[8] Whatever the merit of these approaches, they all see humanity divided along a single primary axis of differentiation, be it class, race, or whatever

[6] See, for instance, the account of Hobsbawm 1990: Chapter 1, or Anderson 2006.
[7] Marx and Engels 2012: 74.
[8] Huntington 1996.

else.[9] Often, they retroject this primary axis into the past and read history as though it too were riven by the same primary divisions that are identified in the present.[10] Sometimes, they are interested only in the present, or only in the "West", and lump together all other evidence in a single, amorphous heap.[11]

This is not good practice.[12] The plurality of axes of differentiation enumerated even in the highly simplified presentation above indicates that we are not dealing with a unidimensional phenomenon. Different sorts of groups can be identified, and while there are certainly elements that divide between the conceptualization of "nations", "classes", and "civilizations", there is also much conceptual overlap.[13] When pressed to do so, it is difficult to formulate a cogent definition for any of these terms. This difficulty is evident in the

[9] There is the further problem that such categories are assumed to exist, as pointed out by Brubaker and Cooper 2000: 6: "The problem is that 'nation,' 'race,' and 'identity' are used analytically a good deal of the time more or less as they are used in practice, in an implicitly or explicitly reifying manner, in a manner that implies or asserts that 'nations,' 'races,' and 'identities' 'exist' and that people 'have' a 'nationality,' a 'race,' an 'identity.'"

[10] The tendency to interpret evidence from the past in terms of rigid groups is noted by Girtler 1982: 43: "In der Ethnologie, der Urgeschichte und anderen Kulturwissenschaften wird von kulturellen Einheiten, wie den 'Völkeren' bzw. Ethnien und 'Kulturen', ausgegangen, um so das vorliegende Datenmaterial einzuordnen." (In ethnology, prehistory, and other cultural studies, the existence of cultural units like 'peoples', ethnic groups, and 'cultures' is assumed and used to classify the available data.)

[11] This approach is critiqued by Routledge 2003: 216-217: "What do we learn about Han China, Fatimid Egypt or the Inca empire when we say they are essentially the same because they are not the West? Such dichotomies of uniqueness are, of course, central to how 'the west' has come to be constructed as 'The West', that is as a supra-historical entity without parallel. However, one would hope that there are ways of theorising 'traditional' states that do not necessitate their reduction to one essential form. One must begin, I would argue, from specific historical contexts, rather than from residual categories."

[12] And there has been some pushback: Cannadine 2013, for instance, enumerates a number of the major axes of differentiation in popular use and argues that they are not as universal and not as socially divisive as they are made out to be. That any single axis of differentiation is not universally relevant is the key insight.

[13] Banton 2011 notes the conceptual blurring that occurs in discussion of ethnicity, race, and nationality, as well as the fuzzy boundaries that (attempt to) divide them.

proliferation of definitions – rarely do any two studies use the same understanding of terms for groups beyond the loosest, most general outlines. In recent decades, it is ethnicity more than any other conceptual framework that has determined the contours of research into social groups.[14] This has percolated down to the study of Mesopotamian antiquity,[15] including Assyria.[16] As is often the case in the study of the ancient world, scholars have imported the model of ethnicity from other fields and applied it to their evidence. At worst, such models are applied uncritically. At best, they are adapted and refined in light of the ancient material. But we don't have to be bound by these models at all. We can challenge the prevailing paradigm and ask, does ethnicity work for us? Is it the right lens?

1.2 Throwing out the Baby, Keeping the Bathwater

> *When ethnicity has come to refer to everything from tribalism to religious sects, from City men in London to the shifting identities of the Shan and Kachin, from regionalism to race, it is difficult to see that it has any universal utility either as an analytical tool or a descriptive one*.

[14] The breadth of this phenomenon in the study of the past is documented in Table 1 in Emberling 1997: 298, which compiles only archaeological studies of ethnicity in antiquity and still brings together dozens of studies.
[15] The 48th *Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale* was dedicated to the subject of "Ethnicity in Ancient Mesopotamia", the proceedings being published in van Soldt 2005; other studies of ethnicity in ancient Mesopotamia include Kamp and Yoffee 1980, Emberling and Yoffee 1999, and Bahrani 2006. Among the many studies of ethnicity in particular Mesopotamian contexts, see Foster 1982, van der Spek 2009, and Buccellati 2013, which represent only a tiny sample of the total.
[16] Most studies of ethnic identity among Assyrians focus on the Neo-Assyrian period, for instance Parpola 2004, Emberling 2014, and Fales 2013, 2015, and 2017. Fales 2013 and 2017 focus on groups other than Assyrians in the context of the Assyrian Empire.

- Karen Blu, The Lumbee Problem[17]

Ethnicity… appears to mean something – indeed, has been imported into lay usage for this reason – but in practice means either everything or nothing at all.

- Anthony Cohen, Culture as Identity[18]

Ethnicity has been a popular way of relating to social groups precisely because it can be stretched and manipulated to describe so many of them. Max Weber was perhaps the first to attempt a systematic definition of ethnicity. For Weber, ethnic groups are characterized by either a real or imagined belief in common descent.[19] This approach has not undergone substantive modification in the century since Weber first formulated his ideas, except perhaps to emphasize the role of common culture in fostering a sense of common descent.[20] In practice, this broad view of ethnicity means that a vast range of groups can be characterized as ethnic –

[17] Blu 2001: 219.
[18] Cohen 1993: 196.
[19] Weber 1978: 389: "We shall call 'ethnic groups' those human groups that entertain a subjective belief in their common descent because of similarities of physical type or of customs or both, or because of memories of colonization and migration; this belief must be important for the propagation of group formation; conversely, it does not matter whether or not an objective blood relationship exists. Ethnic membership (*Gemeinsamkeit*) differs from the kinship group precisely by being a presumed identity, not a group with concrete social action, like the latter. In our sense, ethnic membership does not constitute a group; it only facilitates group formation of any kind, particularly in the political sphere. On the other hand, it is primarily the political community, no matter how artificially organized, that inspires the belief in common ethnicity. This belief tends to persist even after the disintegration of the political community, unless drastic differences in the custom, physical type, or, above all, language exist among its members." Cf. Jenkins 2008: 10-11.
[20] Compare for instance Jones 1997: 84: "Ethnic groups are culturally ascribed identity groups, which are based on the expression of a real or assumed shared culture and common descent." Compare also Brather 2002: 171: "'Ethnic groups' are held together by a *belief* in common culture (costume, law, language, *habitus)* and in common descent. This identity is a 'construction of reality', which pursues social aims. It has a kernel *(Traditionskern)* and a diffuse periphery."

essentially, it includes any group about which one can plausibly say that they have a sense of belonging together. It also treads on the toes of other types of social groups. African-Americans are bound together by common descent, but most would characterize them in racial rather than in ethnic terms. So which is it: ethnicity or race? And does it have to be one to the exclusion of the other? And if not, what does that say about the distinctiveness of the concepts? The expansiveness and indeterminate quality of ethnicity has long troubled scholars. Some have sought to be more precise, offering elaborate typologies for the identification of ethnic groups as opposed to other social formations.[21] In this checklist approach, scholars are asked to compare the group they encounter in their evidence against a set of criteria. They can then determine the "ethnic-ness" of the group they are investigating, and spend a great deal of time arguing about whether a given group falls on this or that side of an arbitrary boundary.

At the other end of the spectrum, it is possible to push for a looser view of ethnicity than that of Weber. One of the most thoughtful modern theorists of ethnicity, Thomas Hylland Eriksen, hews close to Weber's definition but states that "when cultural differences regularly make a difference in interaction between members of groups, the social relationship has an ethnic element."[22] Here, ethnicity becomes an even more transparent substitute for every

[21] Pohl 2013: 6 notes this phenomenon, and he also notes that despite these checklists ethnicity remains conceptually amorphous. For a recent example of such an approach, see A. Smith 2008: 29-30. For the use of classificatory schemes in the context of other conceptual approaches to social groups, see Harald Haarmann 2014: 21-22, which produces a long and detailed catalogue of the "elementary parameters" "for comprehending the collective identity of populations in pre-history and antiquity" that includes 6 broad headings with a total of 27 subheadings.

[22] Eriksen 2010: 17.

manner of social group. In different contexts, cultural differences can attach to everything from a person's profession to their fondness for a certain sports team. These differences can systemtically influence the nature of a person's interactions with outsiders. If all of these interactions are to be regarded as having an "ethnic element", then what is functionally "ethnic" here that cannot also be regarded as inherent to other social formations? More bluntly, what is the added value of ethnicity as a concept? Although we might bristle at the notion that differences of profession and fondness for a sports team can be regarded as having an ethnic element, Eriksen is pointing the way toward a bigger truth about ethnicity. This is the fact that what is so often described as ethnic is essentially a version of all group formation and interaction.

Ethnicity exists in the conceptual realm of collective identity. We can think of this realm as a vast reservoir of ideas relating to social groups. Occasionally, some of these ideas congeal to form a system. In this way we can see several ideas accrete to produce "race", or a slightly different set coalesce into the notion of "ethnicity", and still others agglutinate into "class", "nationality", or some other framework.[23] All of these ways of dividing humans into groups draw from a common well, but end up with a different balance of elements. Sometimes a particular mix of elements is especially helpful in making sense of a certain body of evidence.

[23] That these forms of organization share a common point of origin is skirted in the work of others, too. See for instance Armstrong 1982: 6: "one must recognize that the phenomenon of ethnicity is part of a continuum of social collectivities, including, notably, classes and religious bodies. Over a long period of time each may transmute into one of the others."

Yet if we are to grapple with the phenomenon of social groups as a whole, free from the dictates of only a subset of the pool of possible social formations, we should dispense with ethnicity. Narrowly defined, ethnicity too easily becomes an exercise in checking evidence against subjective criteria; broadly defined, it becomes almost impossible to distinguish from other exercises in social differentiation. Ethnicity is, moreover, the product of a particular intellectual milieu and is freighted with various scholarly and popular assumptions about how societies work that need not apply in other contexts.[24] We don't need any of that baggage. To invert the popular dictum, we should throw out the baby and keep the bathwater. The congealed conceptual mass of ethnicity can go, but the conceptual soup in which it formed has much to recommend it.

A lot of very good thinking about social groups has been done under the guise of ethnicity and related concepts. There is broad continuity between the way ethnicity has been said to operate and the way that other approaches to dividing social groups operate. Indeed, this is one of the main sources of criticism of the concept of ethnicity: "at a basic level, the processes entailed in the construction of ethnicity are essentially similar to the processes involved in the construction of gender, class and kinship in that they are all culturally

[24] This is highlighted by Geary 2015: 10: "The study of ethnicity is meaningful only within specific contexts of contemporary social and political discourse. The terminology is anything but innocent, carrying with it complex and poorly analysed baggage from both modern social scientific and ethnographic literature but even more from contemporary lived experience. What this means is that we cannot study 'ethnicity' as though it were some ahistorical, objective category susceptible to comparison and evaluation across time and space."

constructed categories based on the communication of real or assumed difference."[25] Ethnic dynamics are, in other words, not meaningfully distinguishable from the dynamics that are said to govern other situations of group formation. Take, for instance, the approach to racial formation articulated by sociologists Michael Omi and Howard Winant:

> *The theory of racial formation suggests that society is suffused with racial projects, large and small, to which all are subjected. This racial "subjection" is quintessentially ideological. Everybody learns some combination, some version, of the rules of racial classification, and of her own racial identity, often without obvious teaching or conscious inculcation. Thus are we inserted in a comprehensively racialized social structure. Race becomes "common sense"—a way of comprehending, explaining, and acting in the world. A vast web of racial projects mediates between the discursive or representational means in which race is identified and signified on the one hand, and the institutional and organizational forms in which it is routinized and standardized on the other. These projects are the heart of the racial formation process*.[26]

One can easily replace the word "racial" in Omi and Winant's account with the term "ethnic", "caste", or some other form of social differentiation. The point is that the many crisscrossing

[25] Jones 1997: 85.
[26] Omi and Winant 1994: 60. See Wimmer 2015 for a critique of the race-centric approach of Omi and Winant. Wimmer's critique is rendered moot if one extends Omi and Winant's model of racial formation to group formation more broadly.

fault lines that divide humans into groups operate in analogous ways. Rather than working under the banner of one way of seeing groups, we should work under a universal banner of group dynamics.

The call for such a universal banner has been broached before. In his own systematic treatment of ethnicity, Eriksen likewise questions whether it makes sense to cling to ethnicity at all:

> *Is it still analytically fruitful to think about the social world in terms of ethnicity? Perhaps a wider term, such as 'social identity', would be more true to the flux and complexity of social processes, and would allow us to study group formation and alignments along a greater variety of axes than a single-minded focus on 'ethnicity' would*.[27]

Eriksen's question is the right one. The existing theoretical tools are inadequate. They do not account for the full complexity of group dynamics. We need to build on the work that has been done in the study of ethnicity and other forms of social formation and bring it together under a single conceptual roof. This will recognize the fundamental relatedness of all social groups and

[27] Eriksen 2010: 214. See also Eriksen 2010: 219: "A focus on ethnic processes enables us to investigate topics which are of crucial importance in social anthropology: the relationship between culture, identity and social organisation; the relationship between meaning and politics; the multivocality of symbols; processes of social classification; exclusion and marginalisation at the group level; the relationships between action and structure; structure and process; and continuity and change. Research on ethnicity has opened up exciting new fields in social anthropology, and it still has much to offer. Nonetheless, we ought to be critical enough to abandon the concept of ethnicity the moment it becomes a straitjacket rather than a tool for generating new understanding."

facilitate comparative work. We need a single account of the formation and functioning of social groups. We need the right lens.

1.3 Constructing a New Paradigm – and applying it, too

enūma eliš lā nabû šamāmū

šapliš ammatum šuma lā zakrat

When above, the heavens had not been named,

Below, the earth's name had not been spoken.

- *Enūma eliš* i 1-2[28]

The present study is divided into three chapters. First, we will develop a new lens through which to view social groups. This lens is the social categories approach, which grounds group dynamics in the act of categorization. Although the social categories approach aspires to universal use as an interpretative framework, its first application will be in the context of the Assyrian evidence from the second millennium BCE. The Old and Middle Assyrian evidence will be treated in separate chapters. Each of these chapters attempts to reconstruct the social world in which the Assyrian category is attested. Within the parameters of those social worlds we will examine the character of Assyrians as a social category, trying to identify what space the category occupies in the social landscape and the criteria by which people are included and

[28] Enūma eliš i 1-2 in Lambert 2013: 50.

excluded. This will allow us to answer the questions with which we began: what did it mean to be Assyrian, and did this change over time? The answer should be valuable both from the point of view of scholars working with the Assyrian evidence and from the point of view of those interested in the kinds of insights afforded by the social categories approach.

As a case study in collective identity, Assyrians in the second millennium present a great opportunity. Between the beginning of the millennium and its end, the social world in which we encounter Assyrians undergoes a dramatic transformation. This allows us not only to study the Assyrian category at a single point in time, but to do so at two temporally distant moments separated by profound social change. By comparing the two, we can get a much clearer sense of how the Assyrian category is shaped by different environments. We can also think more deeply about the relationship between categories and social contexts, rather than assuming that the Assyrian category and equivalents elsewhere always function the same way. Accordingly, the *longue durée* perspective of the Assyrian evidence enables us to test the quality of our theoretical lens: does it account for developments we see in the evidence, and does it contribute to our understanding of these developments? Does it substantively improve how we think about the sorts of questions that we asked at the outset? Wherever we look, whenever we look, we can discern the division of humans into groups. The Assyrians are one such group, but the hope is that they will be a gateway to a better understanding of all of them.

2. Collective Identity: A Social Categories Approach

ibirūnimma kakkabū šamā'ī

kiṣrum ša anim imqutam ana ṣērīya

aššišūma iktabit elīya

unīssūma nuššašu ul elte'i

The stars of heaven were passing over my head,

A meteor of Anu fell down before me.

I picked it up but it was too heavy for me,

I pushed at it but I could not move it.

- *Epic of Gilgamesh, The Pennsylvania Tablet* 6-9[29]

2.1 The Desiderata

Von zwei *dingen zu sagen, sie seien identisch, ist Unsinn, und von* Einem *zu sagen, es sei identisch mit sich selbst, sagt gar nichts*.

[29] Gilgamesh Pennsylvania Tablet 6-9 in George 2003: 172-173.

To say of *two* things that they are identical is nonsense, and to say of *one* thing that it is identical with itself is to say nothing at all.

- *Ludwig Wittgenstein, Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* 5.5303[30]

The time has come for the formulation of a flexible framework for understanding collective identity. If we are to engage more productively with the plurality of collective identities that are documented across the broad sweep of the human past and present, we must gather together the fullness of our evidence under the same conceptual roof. Whether they are rooted in sex, or expressed in terms of class, or articulated in ties of kinship, collective identities are all analogous iterations of a universal feature of human social organization: the practice of categorization. Humans divide themselves into categories. The precise contours of these categories vary wildly, but they are the building blocks of the social world. Understanding all collective identities as outgrowths of the same social phenomenon – namely categorization – highlights their essential likeness. Regardless of their form and content, collective identities operate in the same basic ways and serve the same social functions. To substantiate these claims, I propose a model that accounts for the origins and operation of social categories. This is the *social categories approach*. Synthesizing significant research from various fields, the social categories approach explains how social categories form, how social categories behave, and what social categories do; it explains how collective identities arise from social categories and

[30] Wittgenstein 2001: 63.

how collective identities shape the social landscape; and it explains how socially determinant categories structure the social order and how they relate to the distribution of power. By providing a conceptual framework for the study of collective identities and their place in the social world, the social categories approach promises to further the analysis of social systems and the structures that underpin them.

Like all theoretical models, the social categories approach is an abstraction, a simplification of a complex reality that it cannot hope or indeed aspire to replicate in its entirety.[31] It seeks to advance our understanding of social phenomena, and does so with no pretentions to finality. The social categories approach lends itself to ready application in different social and historical contexts, facilitating comparative research. This is the principal desideratum that it seeks to fulfill: establishing the essential likeness of collective identities across time and space permits the comparative analysis of all social categories according to the same criteria and within the same framework. It is therefore no longer necessary to speak of ethnic or religious identities as monolithic entities,[32] but becomes possible to recognize them as composite categories that incorporate elements from multiple spheres in diverse

[31] Healy 2017 is an important plaidoyer for recognizing abstraction as "part of the guts of social theory" (p. 121). Inherent in the process of abstraction is the fact that it must perforce leave scope for the introduction of more nuance and additional dimensions. The social categories approach is no exception in this regard, and where more nuance and additional dimensions further our understanding, I happily leave the task of introducing them to others – or to future me.

[32] Or indeed to speak of them as identities at all, but rather as social categories that can under particular circumstances assume the properties of collective identity. This avoids the "problematic assumptions" inherent in adopting "identity" as an analytical category that are warned against in Brubaker and Cooper 2000: 10.

combinations.[33] The social categories approach also lays bare the extent to which social categories are interwoven with the structure of social relations and with the perpetuation of imbalances in the distribution of power. This ensures that social imbalances occupy their rightful place alongside material imbalances in the consideration of inequality.

2.2 Social Categories

2.2.1 Taxonomic Foundations

> *We have to remember that what we observe is not nature in itself but nature exposed to our method of questioning*.
>
> - *Werner Heisenberg, Physics and Philosophy: The Revolution in Modern Science*[34]

Reality is complex. To navigate it successfully, human beings have evolved cognitive structures that inform our relationship with the world around us. One of these structures is the taxonomic urge.[35] To distinguish one phenomenon from the next, it is necessary to perceive and systematize difference.[36] Reality must be separated into discrete chunks. These chunks are

[33] It is not without irony that a theoretical model that seeks to escape the narrow categories of typological approaches to collective identity should itself be based in categories!
[34] Heisenberg 1958: 58.
[35] Durkheim and Mauss 1969; Gartner 2016: 65-66; Atran 1990: 253.
[36] Zerubavel 1996: 426-427: "Reality is continuous, and if we envision distinct clusters separated from one another by actual gaps it is because we have been socialized to 'see' them… it is by sheer convention that we treat Danish and Norwegian as two separate languages, distinguish heroin from its chemical cousins, which we use as controlled substitutes for it, and cut up continuous stretches of land into separate continents ('North America' and 'Central America,' 'Europe' and 'Asia'). Nor are there any natural divides separating childhood from adulthood, winter from spring, or one day from the next. It is we ourselves who organize reality into 'separate' compartments." See also Zerubavel 1997: 65-66.

identified, categorized,[37] and placed in ever more complex networks of knowledge, manifesting the various interrelationships that are thought to exist between them. Complexity is abstracted and generalized,[38] so that we come to see similarities and dissimilarities, continuity and discontinuity, subjects and objects, and agency and causation. Order is fashioned out of chaos. Precisely how things are lumped together or split apart is variable, but the resulting taxonomies are a universal feature of human cognition[39] that serve as guides to reality.

Humans are social creatures. Our evolutionary niche, carved out over millions of years, is that of hypersocial animals;[40] the reality in which we function is as much social as it is material. The taxonomic urge that gives shape to our reality is therefore not confined to what is extrinsic to humans: it extends to and incorporates the social world.[41] In the same way that taxonomies of the material and natural worlds function as guides to reality, social taxonomies

[37] The utility of categorization as a cognitive process is expressed succinctly by Operario and Fiske 2003: 32: "Categorization allows people to extract meaning from environmental objects by attending to a few diagnostic cues, rather than perceiving every attribute of every object – a time-consuming and labor-intensive task." Although it is true "that humans have evolved a specific intergroup psychology" (as per the Tribal Instinct Hypothesis of van Vugt and Park 2010: 29), this evolutionary intergroup psychology is likely inseparable from categorization as a fundamental cognitive process.

[38] The process of abstraction is essential to human understanding of the world, as it allows symbols to represent much more complex realities and facilitates thinking in terms of these symbols. It is for this reason that Ernst Cassirer called humankind an "*animal symbolicum*" (Cassirer 1972: 25-26). See also Girtler 1982: 48-49.

[39] For categories in Mesopotamian thought, see van de Mieroop 2016: Chapter 1. For other ancient examples see the *Categories* of Aristotle in Aristotle 1938, or the act of Creation in Genesis 1-2, which is all about creating distinctions.

[40] Recent literature on this subject is extensive. See for instance de Waal and Suchak 2010, Burkart, Hrdy, and van Schaik 2009, Silk and House 2011, Burkart et al. 2014; Jaeggi, Burkart, and van Schaik 2010, and Cowl and Shultz 2017.

[41] Atran 1990: Chapters 2 and 3. See also Eriksen 2010: 72-73.

serve to describe the social world.[42] Every social taxonomy consists of a structured set of categories, and these categories divide human beings into groups according to certain variable criteria. By identifying and categorizing groups, social taxonomies give shape to the complex webs of human relationships that comprise the social space. These taxonomies are, moreover, not formed by individuals in isolation. They are produced by humans in existing social networks, whose frequent interactions and communication of views engender common thought communities.[43] Social taxonomies are the joint creations and common cognitive frameworks of such thought communities, constituting the social space as much as they are constituted by it.

2.2.2 Bundles of Stereotypes

> *Now, the Star-Belly Sneetches*
>
> *Had bellies with stars.*
>
> *The Plain-Belly Sneetches*
>
> *Had none upon thars.*

[42] See Hirschfeld 1996: 191-192 for the argument that the construction of social taxonomies begins is childhood and is pivotal to socialization. This view was previously stated by Tajfel 1974: 67: "in any complex society an individual confronts from the beginning of his life a complex network of groupings which presents him with a network of relationships into which he must fit himself." Focusing narrowly on ethnicity, Walter Pohl makes a similar point regarding the importance of constructing social taxonomies. Pohl 2013: 12: "To act successfully in a complex social system would be impossible without massive cognitive and pragmatic efforts to make the world more manageable. Thus, ethnicity reduces the complexity created by the fact that all persons are different, and may act differently and have different allegiances. Therefore, 'ethnic groups' necessarily constitute abstractions. 'Ethnic groups' are not reality itself, they are tools for understanding reality; only if they are successful at making expectations and actions correspond do they become 'real' in the social world." One should replace "ethnicity" in Pohl's exposition with "social categories" more broadly.

[43] Zerubavel 1996: 427, and, on "optical communities", Zerubavel 1997: 33-34.

Those stars weren't so big. They were really so small

You might think such a thing wouldn't matter at all.

- Dr. Seuss, The Sneetches[44]

The building blocks of every social taxonomy are the social categories that comprise their substantive core. A social category distinguishes a group of people from others; the category is itself comprised of sets of stereotypes concerning the people in that group.[45] Within a given social taxonomy,[46] sets of people are grouped together subjectively[47] under a heading – their social category – and any number of characteristics are associated with that heading. In this sense, social categories are guides to *kinds* of people. Stated formulaically, social category *c* is characterized by properties *x*, *y*, and *z*. When encountering any person (*p*) that belongs to category *c*, it is thus possible to infer that properties *x*, *y*, and *z* apply to person *p*. Based on this inference, it should be possible to determine more accurately how person *p* relates to you socially and thus to modulate your behavior accordingly: is *p* a person whose social position requires deference on your part, or someone of little consequence? What do you need to be sensitive to as you interact with *p*? Having ready answers to such questions is an invaluable aid

[44] Seuss 1961: 3.
[45] See Tajfel 1981: 146-150 on the social functions of stereotypes; see also Oakes 1996: 96-105 and Yzerbyt, Rocher, and Schadron 1997, the latter of which argues that stereotypes can function to "rationalize the current social arrangement".
[46] The social taxonomy as a whole has an ontological function, endowing social categories with an overarching form and structure; see Haslam, Rothschild, and Ernst 2000: 123-124: "attributes do not cohere into mental categories without grounding theories."
[47] For the subjectivity of this process, see Niethammer 2000: 35.

in the navigation of social interactions. By determining beforehand the relative social positions of interacting strangers, social categories establish predictable parameters for social exchanges. Reference to social categories thus simplifies and expedites social interaction.

To illustrate the principle: one possible social category in a premodern society might be "grain-grinders", a group that includes those whose job it is to grind grain.[48] Manual grain-grinding is laborious work that involves staying in place over many hours hunched over a supply of grain, all the while engaging in repetitive pulverizing motions to grind the grain into flour. Such work is undesirable, and the task is therefore often allocated to individuals of a low social status. We have our first stereotype: grain-grinders are low status individuals.[49] Grinding grain is physically taxing and can in the long term inflict considerable damage to the lower back, toes, and knees, so that there might also be a stereotype about grain-grinders being sore-backed, sore-toed, and sore-kneed.[50] Grain-grinding often brings grinders together to work in parallel.[51] This is an ideal setting for engaging in talk, and another stereotype might be that of the garrulous grain-grinder. We thus have in simplified form a social category with its

[48] Grain-grinding is a fundamental but labor intensive economic activity in the wheat-based agricultural societies of antiquity; for an account of the scale, social organization, and process of grain-grinding in Mesopotamia in the Ur III period, see Grégoire 1999. A passing literary reference to grain-grinding can also be found in Homer's *Odyssey*, Book 20, lines 105-111.

[49] The association between grinding grain and low social status is unmistakable in the Mesopotamian literary tradition. For a brief survey of some of this material, see Matuszak 2016: 233-242. For an account of the role of women as grain-grinders in the ancient Near East, see Stol 2016: 350-353.

[50] Lang 2016: 284.

[51] For a bleak visual representation and interpretation of such a scene, see Figure 1 in Cooper 2016: 210. The same image is reproduced in Stol 2016: 350 (Fig. 22).

accompanying set of stereotypes. The utility and reliability of these stereotypes will be variable, but they provide a handy set of associations that inform social engagement, doing away with much of the complexity that a first encounter with a stranger might otherwise entail. If one were to encounter a grain-grinder, one would have a probabilistically reliable set of references to guide interactions with that grain-grinder.

Social categories are ultimately attempts to make sense of an individual in the context of a group. If an individual is identified as belonging to a certain social category, the data that describes the group can be extended to the individual. For purposes of social navigation, the utility of social categories is thus dependent on the quality of their content. Stereotypes and associations that pertain to a social category must encode socially relevant information that is particular to the group they are describing. The higher the level of descriptive detail, the better the category is likely to be. In addition to the subjective nature of categorization itself, there is also a subjective element in determining the precise composition of a social category. Different individuals have different points of view and different experiences, and there can therefore be some variation in the content of a social category among people who make use of it, even though the major elements remain in place.[52]

[52] Individual variation in the use of social categories and the perception of those they purport to describe is accounted for in the following terms by Bourdieu 1985: 728: "The objects of the social world can be perceived and uttered in different ways because, like objects in the natural world, they always include a degree of indeterminacy and fuzziness – owing to the fact, for example, that even the most constant combinations of properties are only founded on statistical connections between interchangeable features; and also because, as historical objects, they are subject to variations in time so that their meaning, insofar as it depends on the future, is itself in suspense, in

The qualitative value of the data encoded by social categories is largely a function of social distance. Where a social category describes a group that occupies a proximate position in the social space to that of the observer, more will be known about that group. Accordingly, there will be scope for a much more refined and differentiated set of data with which to give substance to the social category. This expanded scope is often evident in the multiplication of social categories among people who operate in the same social space. For a farmer in a specialized agricultural system, for instance, it might make sense to maintain separate categories to describe cultivators of wheat and cultivators of barley, as there might be differences between the two that, while subtle or insignificant to those who do not come into immediate or regular contact with agriculturalists, are nevertheless appreciable to the farmers themselves. Social proximity thus gives rise to a splintering of categories that is obscured the further one moves from a social location, with the result that difference is collapsed into a single overarching rubric – in this case, "farmer". A similar collapsing of difference takes place any time a social category is used to denote a group distant from the social space that is producing the category, resulting in categories that describe vast, barely differentiated groups.[53] The classical Greek category "barbarian", for instance, has no reliable content beyond

waiting, dangling, and therefore relatively indeterminate. This element of play, of uncertainty, is what provides a basis for the plurality of world views, itself linked to the plurality of points of view, and to all the symbolic struggles for the power to produce and impose the legitimate world-view and, more precisely, to all the cognitive 'filling-in' strategies that produce the meaning of the objects of the social world by going beyond the directly visible attributes by reference to the future or the past."

[53] This same notion is articulated in the context of ethnicity by Eriksen 2010: 72: "Ethnic taxonomies tend to become less detailed with increasing perceived social distance from oneself. In Europe it is therefore common to

the negation of Hellenicity; inversely, a classical Athenian would have categories describing various other Greeks, as well as categories describing people from different neighborhoods within Athens itself, and within those neighborhoods it is likely that there was still further categorical segmentation.

Within any social taxonomy, then, different individuals will maintain different sets of social categories with slight differences in content, and they will deploy categories in contextually-bound and idiosyncratic ways. Major categories will be familiar in some form to all participants in the social system, but the familiarity and utility of others will vary depending on their distance from and situational relevance to the individual. A cluster of social categories can be compressed into a single category, while a single social category can be expanded into numerous sub-categories. This plasticity offers a malleable structure that meets the taxonomic needs of individual cognition while fitting neatly into whatever taxonomic scheme permeates a given social system.[54] The adaptability of social categories at the level of the individual is a critical element in their use, but such adaptability must occur within a common taxonomic framework for the category to be communicable: without the common taxonomic scheme, it

think of 'Africans' or 'North American Indians' as ethnic categories, although each of these 'groups' comprises hundreds of mutually exclusive ethnic categories. Clearly, it would have been impractical (and in most cases impossible) to make hundreds of fine distinctions between categories of people: usually, one will limit oneself to making those distinctions which are socially relevant. Ethnic classification can thus be seen as a practical way of creating order in the social universe." The term "social" can be substituted for the term "ethnic" in this passage.

[54] Social categorization derives much of its effectiveness from its flexibility and from its sensitivity both to individual cognition and to particular contexts. See Oakes 2003: 9: "*It is this complete dependence on variable features of both perceivers and contexts that enables categorization to fulfil its meaning-giving, identity-conferring function in perception*."

becomes impossible for actors within the same social system to communicate readily and effectively in terms of social categories and the information they convey. Operative social categories need to be understood by all parties within a broad sphere of interaction in more or less the same way.[55] The major social categories serve as the nodes around which other social categories cluster, enabling the maintenance of differences in the use of social categories within a common general scheme.

It is important to note two further characteristics of social categories. First, because social categories can divide people based on any criterion or set of criteria, many divisions are not mutually exclusive. A single individual will simultaneously be included in numerous distinct social categories, and the list of possibilities is theoretically endless. Someone is at one and the same time a woman, elderly, short, wealthy, a connoisseur of literature, epicurean, a speaker of a given language, a resident of a given place, a landowner, large-nosed, pessimistic, a wit, a devotee of Rati, and so on *ad infinitum*. Each and every one of these descriptive traits constitutes belonging to a possible social category, some of which are more likely to be operative than others; the relevant categories through which to approach and comprehend another individual are contextually determined.

[55] As abstractions, social categories are symbols. Their symbolic property functions to produce social consensus about how the social world ought to be interpreted. This is articulated by Bourdieu 1991: 166: "Symbols are the instruments *par excellence* of 'social integration': as instruments of knowledge and communication (cf. Durkheim's analysis of the festivity), they make it possible for there to be a *consensus* on the meaning of the social world, a consensus which contributes fundamentally to the reproduction of the social order."

Second, and following on this, social categories often function as constellations. When encountering another person, social actors identify a particular node – the salient category describing the other person in the relevant context – and then qualify this category by linking it to various other pertinent social categories. The result is a composite picture comprised of a set of categories centered on the primary node. This individualized bundle of categories can convey a great deal of information about the person it is intended to describe, constructing a detailed portrait that serves as a baseline for the subsequent encounter. Certain settings will privilege certain categories. In a bar, for instance, a heterosexual woman in search of a paramour will fixate on the category "man", looking first and foremost for someone of the opposite sex. This category will then be supplemented by various others to cohere as a set that describes an appropriate potential partner. It is on this basis that the woman will then pursue her amorous agenda. In a similar fashion, good salespeople establish constellations of categories that describe the people who are likeliest to purchase their wares; at tourist attractions, peddlers of trinkets and hawkers of knickknacks often focus their energies on particular types of people, marked by their sartorial choices and accessories (Bermuda shorts, panama hats, fanny packs, and large cameras), as well as by other characteristics.[56] This is, indeed, the core business model of social media platforms like Facebook, which sell targeted advertising on the presumption that access to a handful of data points about their users (notably demographic

[56] See Narayan 2006: 45 for a novelistic portrayal of such profiling of people by a tourist guide in India.

information and preferences – "likes") allows them to make wide-ranging and statistically useful inferences about a person;[57] these inferences can extend far beyond the areas covered by the initial data points, such that membership in a social category allows you to make deductions about the probability of membership in other social categories. These deductions are cumulative, and their quality improves in proportion to the number of initial data points.

2.2.3 The Formation of Social Categories

> וַיִּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת-הָאָדָם בְּצַלְמוֹ, בְּצֶלֶם אֱלֹהִים בָּרָא אֹתוֹ: זָכָר וּנְקֵבָה, בָּרָא אֹתָם

> And god created Man in his image, in the image of God He created him: Male and female he created them.

> - *Genesis 1: 27*

> ἐκ τούτων οὖν φανερὸν ὅτι τῶν φύσει ἡ πόλις ἐστί, καὶ ὅτι ὁ ἄνθρωπος φύσει πολιτικὸν ζῷον

> Hence it is evident that the *state* is a creation of nature, and that man is by nature a political animal.

> - *Aristotle, Politics* 1253 a[58]

[57] See for example Merrill 2016a and 2016b.

[58] Aristotle 1944: 8-9 (*Politics* 1253 a). There is some debate about what, precisely, Aristotle means by the phrase "political animal": is he speaking about humans as consociational creatures, who group together to form "states", or is he speaking specifically about humans as creatures whose naturally optimal form of organization is not the

Social taxonomies and their constituent categories are attempts to describe and make sense of the social world. As such, the social categories that comprise a given taxonomy are shaped by the social world that they endeavor to describe; classification builds on the social order that informs it. In small-scale egalitarian societies, for example, social taxonomies are – like the societies that inform them – restricted in scope. This is especially true of societies that are sufficiently compact to permit direct knowledge of all other human actors in the social system; compactness of this kind enables individuals to maintain mental maps with clear, individuated slots for all social actors. It is also possible for individuals in such societies to keep track of the relationships that the other participants in the social system maintain with each other. Accordingly, social characteristics can be more productively associated with individuals than with groups. While social categories are restricted in small-scale societies, there are at least two biologically determined sets of categories that appear to be universal, namely those pertaining to sex and age. As categories, sex and age are very much constrained by their biological basis. Although there are multiple ways to define gender beyond male and female, the female-male sex dichotomy is fundamental because it describes a biological difference in reproductive roles. Similarly, while age can theoretically be deconstructed down to the moment of one's birth, there are a limited number of developmental stages that characterize the life

generic "state" but the particularly Greek *polis*? The ambiguity is not fully resolved in Aristotle's own writing, and has spawned considerable debate. See in particular Mulgan 1974 and C. D. C. Reeve's comments on the matter in Aristotle 1998: xlviii-lix (§7), the latter of which has a fine supplementary bibliography.

course of human beings, which proceeds from infancy to maturity and old age; the boundaries between such developmental categories can vary, as can the number of intermediate categories that are added to the sequence (adolescence, middle-age, etc.), but the major stages are broadly universal and unchanging. Although the particular iterations of categories describing sex and age accrue a great deal of socially conditioned and idiosyncratic content,[59] their presence in social taxonomies is unfailing. What even the most universal of social categories demonstrate, however, is that all social categories exist in relation to others – there is no male without female, and no adult without child. It is only through their relationship to other categories that social categories form and acquire their meaning.

In more complex large-scale societies, regular interaction between people who are functional strangers to each other becomes commonplace. This increased complexity makes it impossible to maintain an individuated mental map of the social world, or to keep track of the myriad relationships between the many individual actors in the social system. The need for a social map does not, however, disappear: if anything, it becomes all the greater as an essential navigational aid in the management of ever more impersonal human relationships. Accordingly, there is a need in complex societies to expand the rudimentary social taxonomies of small-scale egalitarian societies with additional categories.[60] These supplementary categories encode

[59] See in particular the outstanding work of Goffman 1977 on this issue.
[60] This is the crux of Benedict Anderson's argument regarding "imagined communities". When strangers are grouped together without knowing or getting to know each other individually, the communities they form are necessarily mental constructs, and thus imagined. Anderson 2006: 6: "All communities larger than primordial

increasing social complexity and help manage the increased uncertainty in social interactions by structuring the social space.[61] Enhanced social taxonomies permit the introduction of fine distinctions between groups of participants in the social system, dividing up the social space along an ever-expandable series of axes; these axes can themselves be sliced into still finer sections to obtain ever greater degrees of precision and specificity in categorization, before culminating with the smallest, indivisible unit, namely the individual.

Social taxonomies in complex societies thus complement universal, biologically determined social categories relating to sex and age with increasingly complex categories. Because of the much greater range of possibilities available in the determination of category boundaries beyond age and sex, there is much greater flexibility in crafting these categories. They are, consequently, less uniform and more socially particular. When Europeans first arrived in the Americas, "Christian" was for them a central category, but it had no resonance among the native peoples; native religious categories similarly had no resonance among the Europeans. Despite their common "religious" content, European and native American social categories were not mutually intelligible, nor would it be reasonable to expect them to have been so. Complex categories are impermanent and susceptible to change over time. The prevailing racial categories in Western societies today – along with the very notion of "race" as

villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined. Communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined."

[61] They also help to reinforce social hierarchies and inequalities in the distribution of power of the kind that arise with the establishment of states, as per Scott 2017.

a social category – did not, for instance, exist in an analogous form in the ancient societies that many in the West claim as their intellectual and cultural progenitors.[62] Complex categories also need not enclose the same semantic content even when the same category exists in different taxonomies. As a trait, egotism is widely recognized across cultures, and the egotistical can function as a social category unto themselves. What precisely constitutes egotism, however, can vary quite dramatically. In many individualistically oriented Western societies today, marrying a person of one's choosing based on one's own criteria is not generally regarded as self-centered; marriage is thought to be the concern of the individuals involved. In more collectively oriented societies, marrying in accordance with one's own preferences and at one's own choosing can be regarded as self-centered, because it serves the desires and ends of the individual alone rather than those of the parents, extended family, or broader social unit to which the individual is thought to belong. Categories in one social taxonomy need not exist in any other taxonomy,[63] and when they exist in two or more taxonomies their semantic content need not overlap significantly or share the same associated stereotypes.

[62] There has been considerable scholarship on the place of race and racism in classical antiquity, including the notable examples of McCoskey 2012 (see also McCoskey 2002) and Isaac 2004. While McCoskey and Isaac argue that there was a notion of race in classical Mediterranean societies, its content was altogether different from that of modern Western taxonomies. Cf. Gruen 2011.

[63] A nice example of the cultural particularity of social categories concerns the degree of differentiation for categories of kinship. In English, the narrow use of the category "uncle" designates a male sibling of either of one's parents. In Arabic, this category is divided to differentiate between maternal and parental uncles (خال and عم respectively), reflecting the heightened importance of such differences in that sociocultural milieu.

Regardless of the set of social categories that prevails in any given society, access to a more sophisticated complement of categories is a prerequisite for the effective functioning of an increasingly complex social landscape. Although categories are socially contingent, there are nevertheless certain conceptual clusters that feature prominently in discussions of social categories. Among the more common social category clusters are those that relate to the notions of occupation, class, religion, language, descent group, race, ideology, culture, ethnicity, and territory – themselves often taxonomically particular descriptors for *kinds* of social categories.[64] The boundaries between some of these broad category clusters are, moreover, fluid and occasionally absent altogether. Such clusters are expressions of some of the major axes along which the social space can be divided: kinship, cultural practice, social status, geography. If there are essential likenesses in the kinds of social categories that function at these higher levels of abstraction, this is a product of the limited number of nodes along which human social organization concentrates when viewed with sufficient distance. As an intricate topography of social relations, the social taxonomy essentially maps the nodes along which human relationships most readily coalesce, places where social proximity is maximized.

[64] This is reflected in the genealogies of the book of Genesis, where Genesis 4: 20-22 is an aetiology of various economic specializations while Genesis 10 is an aetiology of nations (גּוֹיִם). Genesis thus represents the origins of two different modes of social organization through the same genealogical framework. See also Hirschfeld 1996: 199: "there are a myriad of human kinds that people recognize, ranging across categories based on physique, personality, occupation, gender, nationality, and so on. Among these human kinds, there are some that are construed as intrinsic – as flowing from some nonobvious commonality that all members of the kind share. Again, the range of such intrinsic kinds is quite broad, including among others gender, kinship, and race. Intrinsic kinds are culturally quite variable."

Relationships are forged where people come together: people come together in reproductive units (kinship),[65] as successful reproduction requires sustained relations between offspring and caregivers over many years; they come together in shared cultural practices, codes of conduct, experiences, and belief systems, which include common language and ritual observance; they come together in their relationship to the means and fruits of production, giving shape to occupational cohesion and to class differences informed by differentiated access to socioeconomic resources; and they come together in physical space,[66] be it in a house, a neighborhood, a town, or any circumscribed geographical territory (complicated today by the coming together of people in virtual space). Because there are common nodes of human social organization, there are consequently common *kinds* of social categories across different social taxonomies.

Each social taxonomy is informed by the idiosyncratic fractures of its own social world. There are universal fractures, like those describing age and sex, and more complex kinds of fractures that tend to center on particular sites in the social landscape. Social categories respond to this, attempting to establish functional descriptions for the groups that fall on either

[65] See Zerubavel 2012 for an account of the centrality of genealogical thinking to the construction of many social categories. Note Zerubavel 2012: 46: "Not only does our genealogical vision of co-descent help connect in our minds various 'relatives' (from siblings, through second cousins, to any other human beings) as individuals, it also seems to provide the mental cement necessary for constructing actual communities. In other words, it also constitutes a formidable basis for group formation."

[66] This is not to suggest that spatial proximity necessarily results in the coalescence of human relationships, but merely to point out that it often does. It is, however, possible for people to live cheek by jowl without developing meaningful relationships across (and sometimes even within) category boundaries.

side of any fracture. Because fractures cleave the social world along many axes simultaneously, most categories are composite, in that they are composed of numerous others. This creates intricate networks of categories, in which a single category can have an independent existence at the same time that it is subsumed in numerous others. A classic example is Herodotus' formulation of the category of "Greek", which he defines as a function of common descent, language, religion, and culture: "Then again, there is the fact that we are all Greeks. We share blood and language, we have temple and rituals in common, and we have a common way of life."[67] In Herodotus' conception, if a person falls on the correct side of a series of axes of social differentiation, that person belongs to the category "Greek". While "Greek" is a composite category, it is itself an element in other composite categories: Herodotus records that competitors in the Olympic games must be Greek,[68] so that as a social category "Olympian" subsumes "Greek". The composite character of social categories draws attention to their semantic dependence on other categories, and thus to their subordinate existence as part of a broader social taxonomy.

[67] Histories 8.144.2: αὖτις δὲ τὸ Ἑλληνικὸν ἐὸν ὅμαιμόν τε καὶ ὁμόγλωσσον καὶ θεῶν ἱδρύματά τε κοινὰ καὶ θυσίαι ἤθεά τε ὁμότροπα, τῶν προδότας γενέσθαι Ἀθηναίους οὐκ ἂν εὖ ἔχοι. See Bowersock 1990: 7 for an account of what "Hellenism" came to represent in late antiquity.

[68] Herodotus 5.22: "I can personally vouch for the correctness of the claim of these Macedonians, who are descendants of Perdiccas, to be Greeks, and I will prove in a later part of my work that they are Greeks. Besides, the officials in charge of the Greek games at Olympia have acknowledged that this is so. After all, once when Alexander decided to compete in the games and came down to Olympia for that purpose, the Greeks who were drawn against him in the foot-race tried to prevent him from taking part, on the grounds that non-Greeks were not allowed to compete in the games, which were exclusively for Greeks. However, Alexander proved that he was actually an Argive and was therefore judged to be Greek." [Waterfield 311].

There is a practically endless potential for the creation of social categories, even if sex and age have universal dimensions and many categories focus on a limited set of significant nodes. Categorization is a form of social mapping and builds on the social order that informs it, and therefore mirrors the constraints and tendencies of human social organization. Because social categories derive their significance from their relationship to other categories, many of them are composite in nature: they often integrate other social categories into their own semantic range. This brings about an interweaving of categories, so that they can both subsume and be subsumed by others. In the resulting tapestry, social categories occupy non-exclusive and overlapping stitches, which represent their sphere of signification. Such stitches are not fixed into place, as they are constantly being rewoven to suit the reality they endeavor to describe. It is in response to social changes that the social map and its attendant categories are adjusted by their users, establishing a dynamic process of category formation and change. In this process of perpetual flux, older categories are cannibalized by newer ones, stereotypes and semantic content are constantly being shuffled around, and there is always something new under the sun.

2.2.4 Social Category Dynamics

> Gewohnheit der Gegensätze. – *Die allgemeine ungenaue Beobachtung sieht in der Natur überall Gegensätze (wie z.B. "warm und kalt"), wo keine Gegensätze, sondern nur Gradverschiedenheiten sind. Diese schlechte Gewohnheit hat uns verleitet, nun auch*

noch die innere Natur, die geistig-sittliche Welt, nach solchen Gegensätzen verstehen und zerlegen zu wollen. Unsäglich viel Schmerzhaftigkeit, Anmaßung, Härte, Entfremdung, Erkältung ist so in die menschliche Empfindung hineingekommen dadurch, daß man Gegensätze an Stelle der Übergänge zu sehen meinte.

Habit of seeing opposites: The general imprecise way of observing sees everywhere in nature opposites (as, e.g., 'warm and cold') where there are, not opposites, but differences of degree. This bad habit has led us into wanting to comprehend and analyse the inner world, too, the spiritual-moral world, in terms of such opposites. An unspeakable amount of painfulness, arrogance, harshness, estrangement, frigidity has entered into human feelings because we think we see opposites instead of transitions.

- *Friedrich Nietzsche, Der Wanderer und sein Schatten (The Wanderer and his Shadow)* [69]

For all that social categories are instrumental in making sense of the social world, the dynamics of their use is not straightforward. Social categories are not merely descriptive or passive. Instead, they enjoy an element of agency and creative force. Once a social category is ensconced in the cognitive machinery of the participants in a social system, it serves not only to describe a group of people, but can also act as a reference point for the calibration of social expectations. Determining that someone belongs to a certain social category can have

[69] Nietzsche 1996: 326.

significant implications for how that person is perceived, regardless of the quality of the determination. This is true in the sense that categorization establishes parameters for appropriate behavior when interacting with the person that is categorized; it is likewise true in the sense that individuals are often interpreted in line with category-specific expectations.[70] In New York City, for example, police officers operate with social categories like "criminal" or "thug", which have their own content. Stop-and-frisk policies call for the preventive stopping of individuals who are perceived to be likely to belong to these categories, generally on the basis of their location, skin-tone, and other markers of a low socioeconomic status. As a result, stop-and-frisk policies have disproportionately affected individuals who appear to fit the profile of "criminals" or "thugs", regardless of the extent to which they engage in crime or thuggery.[71] Inversely, individuals in communities who are targeted by such policing methods are much more likely to have negative views of police officers and to interpret their actions as hostile.[72] Individuals who are deemed to belong or to be likely to belong to a social category are often approached as though all assumptions about people in that social category apply to them, and their behavior is interpreted accordingly. Someone in a suit is unlikely to be regarded as a candidate for a search by the police, while someone wearing clothes indicating a low

[70] See Kunda and Thagard 1996 for an overview of the role of stereotypes in influencing the interpretation of the actions of individuals, as well as for an attempt to comprehend how stereotypes and individuating information interact.
[71] Gelman, Fagan, and Kiss 2007:821-822, and Fagan and Geller 2015:61-66. On page 62, Fagan and Geller note that "most stops were concentrated in a relatively small number of neighborhoods with high crime rates, concentrations of non-White residents, and severe socioeconomic disadvantage."
[72] Najdowski, Bottoms, and Goff 2015.

socioeconomic status is much more likely to be regarded as suspicious. If the former loiters at the entrance of the building, the assumption is likely to be that all is well, but if the latter loiters in the same place, the assumption is likely to be that something improper is afoot. In this way, the application of categories actively influences the mental processes and subsequent actions of individuals. When categories are applied at scale, they can produce systemic biases that shape and structure social relations, so that the use of social categories has a tangible impact on the social landscape.

The influence of social categories on social expectations is not limited to the perception of others, but also extends to self-perception. In the same way that categories serve as reference points for the calibration of social expectations when it comes to dealing with others, they serve to calibrate expectations about how individuals should themselves act. When an individual identifies with a social category, they are likely to look to its contents and adopt the behaviors and practices that are associated with that category.[73] If "boys don't cry", young males will strive not to cry in order to conform to the expectations that pertain to their social category.[74] Emulating category-appropriate behaviors in a process of mimesis can result in the

[73] This has been observed among chimpanzees; young female chimpanzees demonstrate a significantly greater readiness to imitate their mothers – who are their role models – than do their male counterparts, who will never grow up to be adult females. See Lonsdorf, Eberly, and Pusey 2004.

[74] Patricia Crone argues that identification with social roles is especially characteristic of pre-industrial societies. See Crone 2003: 114: "People were made to identify with their social roles through constant reminders that 'boys', 'girls', 'fathers', 'peasants', 'gentlemen', etc., do this and do not do that: boys do not weep, gentlemen keep their word, and so on. In short, they were trained to mould their characters on the basis of pre-defined models, the highest reward being praise as a model boy, a model girl, a model student or whatever other model one might aspire to. Members of modern Western society often dislike such models, regarding them as outmoded and

adoption of practices that are not intuitive from the point of view of the individual: the supporters of the London football club Tottenham Hotspur regularly refer to themselves as "Yids" and the "Yid Army", Yid being a derogatory term for Jews that supporters of other football clubs used to taunt Tottenham fans at a time when this fan base was perceived to be disproportionately Jewish.[75] Tottenham supporters have since reappropriated the term, and although only a small minority of the club's fans are Jewish today, many continue to regard themselves as Yids. The result is that thousands of people with little to no notion of Jews or Judaism sit in a stadium with others and chant that they are the Yid Army, because this is what Tottenham supporters are supposed to do. An analogous situation prevails among supporters of the Amsterdam football club Ajax, whose supporters call themselves "Joden" or "Superjoden" – Dutch for "Jews" and "Superjews" – and often sport star of David tattoos and other Jewish symbols despite the fact that few have any ties to or knowledge of Jews or Judaism.[76] In these and many other situations, social categories influence the actions of those who identify with them and promote conformity with category-specific expectations. Beyond mimesis, the proclivity to internalize stereotypes pertaining to one's social category can have a measurable impact on an individual's functioning in certain areas, both positive and negative. This phenomenon is known as stereotype threat when it impairs functioning and as stereotype

intolerable restrictions on the expression of individuality. Members of pre-industrial societies, however, did not see them as restrictions on their personalities, but rather as definitions of the personalities they were expected to adopt."

[75] See Poulton and Durell 2016 for a fuller account.

[76] C. Smith 2005.

lift or boost when it improves functioning, and has been documented in numerous case studies.[77]

There is, then, an active feedback loop: social categories are comprised of stereotypes and associations, they can produce behaviors and results that conform to these stereotypes and associations, and these practical consequences work to confirm ideas regarding the content of the social categories.[78] The same feedback loop operates when social categories are applied to others: there is an expectation that individuals will conform to their social category, their actions are interpreted accordingly, and these actions can then be held up as confirmation of the expectations determined by the social category. Social categories and their utilization thus work in tandem to reinforce each other, establishing a tyranny of expectations in which social categories can exert great pressure toward conformity. This is an environment ripe for self-fulfilling prophecies.[79] Of course, the agentive force of social categories is constrained by

[77] For stereotype threat, see Shapiro 2012; for a case study of the role of stereotype threat in the test-taking performance of African-Americans, see Steele and Aronson 1995. For stereotype lift and stereotype boost, see Shih, Pittinsky, and Ho 2012.

[78] The main elements in this process are described by Bourdieu in different terms, for which see Bourdieu 1991: 120-121: "The institution of an identity, which can be a title of nobility or a stigma ('you're nothing but a ...'), is the imposition of a name, i.e. of a social essence. To institute, to assign an essence, a competence, is to impose a right to be that is an obligation of being so (or to be so). It is to *signify* to someone what he is and how he should conduct himself as a consequence. In this case, the indicative is an imperative… Social essence is the set of those social attributes and attributions produced by the act of institution as a solemn act of categorization which tends to produce what it designates. The act of institution is thus an act of communication, but of a particular kind: it *signifies* to someone what his identity is, but in a way that both expresses it to him and imposes it on him by expressing it in front of everyone *(kategorein,* meaning originally, to accuse publicly) and thus informing him in an authoritative manner of what he is and what he must be."

[79] Merton 1968: 477 provides an eloquent definition of the self-fulfilling prophecy in social theory: "The self-fulfilling prophecy is, in the beginning, a false definition of the situation evoking a new behavior which makes the originally false conception come true. The specious validity of the self-fulfilling prophecy perpetuates a reign of

their ability to inspire conformity and act as interpretative lenses. Social categories like eye color are held to have little explanatory power, so that by itself eye color will not generally motivate people to behave in certain ways or to alter their treatment of others. Such categories thus have little agentive potential; to the extent that there are people who use eye color as a heuristic, they are few and their use of the category in this way will have limited social impact. Even when social categories are widely regarded as diagnostic and thus enjoy extensive agentive force, their power remains one of probabilities. They increase the likelihood of compliance with category norms, but cannot guarantee such compliance.

Further factors serve to limit the efficacy of social categories as social agents. One of these factors is their dynamic character. Because social categories are always undergoing a process of renegotiation and adjustment, they do not function as stable referents over the long term. In recent times, it took less than a century for the category "Lithuanian" to undergo a dramatic transformation from one that enclosed largely geographic content to one that denoted a national community defined principally by its use of the Lithuanian language.[80] Comparable transformations regularly take place in the semantic content of other categories, while new categories form and established ones fall into desuetude. This instability is compounded by the fact that social categories are not tangible, clearly bounded entities.

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error. For the prophet will cite the actual course of events as proof that he was right from the very beginning. Such are the perversities of social logic." For an analysis of behavioral confirmation in social interaction, see M. Snyder 1992, who also cites Merton.

[80] T. Snyder 2003: Part 1.

Rather, they are often ungraspable bundles of conceptual fog with porous, permeable boundaries. As descriptions of reality, social categories are imperfect and imprecise: this is inherent to their function as heuristic simplifications of the social world. Accordingly, they can never account fully for the many shades of grey that characterize human social life. In the United States of America in the 19th and early 20th centuries, efforts to maintain the inferior status of individuals of African origins ran into the legal problem of definitions. The category "negro" was in widespread social use, but translating what appeared to be a straightforward category into law was a difficult and contentious process:[81] who is a negro? How much African ancestry qualifies one as a negro? Answers ranged from the one drop rule – even one African ancestor, no matter how distant, qualified one as a negro – to less stringent qualifications; new categories like mulatto that accounted for ambiguous cases were also used occasionally, but enjoyed little success in a polarized racial landscape that wanted people to be either white or black. While few people in the USA will have had much difficulty distinguishing between blacks and whites for social purposes,[82] the outer boundaries of these categories could be unclear, variable, and subject to renegotiation. Where social categories cannot be mapped satisfactorily onto individuals, their referential and agentive force declines. If an individual's category is unclear to them or to those who perceive them, how are they to conform to its expectations?

[81] See Hickman 1997 for an account of some of the difficulties encountered in the USA when trying to translate racial categories into legal practice.
[82] For exceptions, see Hobbs 2014.

Another element in the dynamics of social categories is the subjective dimension of their use. Social taxonomies are approximations not so much of the social world as it really is (*wie es eigentlich gewesen* [*ist*], as per the historically positivist formulation of Leopold von Ranke), but of the social world as it is perceived. This difference is subtle, but significant. Social categories do not exist independently of those who make use of them or the circumstances of their use, and how they are understood varies from individual to individual and context to context. Although the need for intelligibility and translatability ensures that the subjective and situational view of social categories does not generally stray too far from established meanings, these meanings are nevertheless mediated through individual perception. The ensuing differences provide the necessary scope for conceptual shift, so that when enough people within a taxonomic system come to accept a variant element in the comprehension of a social category, this variant can become normative. Crucially, the constant adaptation of social categories to the reality they endeavor to describe is mediated by individual perception rather than by any objective understanding of the social world.

The use of social categories does not only confront problems of agency and subjectivity. Additional complicating factors are the multiplicity of social categories and their propensity for endless qualification, both of which add to the ambiguity of category use. No one individual can be categorized entirely and exclusively by any one category. If someone is classified as a farmer, it is always possible to ask: well, what *kind* of farmer? A Woman? Well, what kind? A German?

Well, what kind? The answer to this question – what *kind* – is dependent on the sorts of categories one is interested in, on the nature of the supplementary data with which one seeks to qualify one's operative category. Kinds of farmers could relate to crop types, personalities, or their legal relationship to the land they farm; kinds of women might relate to age, social class, or profession; kinds of Germans can be indexed to geography, religious affiliation, or political inclination. In other words, any category can be subdivided in myriad ways according to the interests of the person who is doing the subdividing and the purposes of the subdivision. The use of social categories always functions in relation to other categories and is bound by the subjectivity of perceiver and circumstance, so that the meaning of a category is never absolute. This is also apparent in the multiplicity of social categories. As the very act of qualification implies, individuals exist simultaneously in multiple social dimensions, occupying space in many social categories. Crossed and multiple categorization are inescapable elements in the application of social categories;[83] such multiplicity emphasizes yet again that in any given interaction an operative category is viewed as the principal interpretative lens, to be adjusted in light of whatever other categories are regarded as pertinent qualifiers. Even in extreme cases where only one category is regarded as relevant and all others are theoretically dismissed as irrelevant (as in the Rwandan genocide, where membership in the category "Tutsi" was ostensibly the only relevant criterion determining life and death, or in any comparably extreme

[83] For an analysis of multiple and crossed categorization, see Crisp and Hewstone 2000.

in- versus outgroup scenario), in practice there is differential treatment of individuals based on qualifying categories, the subjectivity of social actors, and the particular set of prevailing circumstances.

2.2.5 Identifying Social Categories

> *Then they yelled at the ones who had stars at the start,*
>
> *"We're exactly like you! You can't tell us apart.*
>
> *We're all just the same, now, you snooty old smarties!*
>
> *And now we can go to your frankfurter parties."*
>
> *"Good grief!" groaned the ones who had stars at the first.*
>
> *"We're still the best Sneetches and they are the worst.*
>
> *But, now, how in the world will we know," they all frowned,*
>
> *"If which kind is what, or the other way round?"*
>
> *- Dr. Seuss, The Sneetches*[84]

For social categories to function on the practical level, there must be some way to identify the categories to which people belong. Methods of identification can be distinct from the social categories they are intended to identify. This distinction can be regarded as the

[84] Seuss 1961: 12-13.

difference between the *criteria* and the *indicia* of identification.[85] The *criteria* of identification represent the essential preconditions for belonging to a group: in orthodox Judaism, for instance, the basis for Jewish identity is either matrilineal descent from recognized Jews or conversion under orthodox auspices. Neither criterion can be communicated readily, so that orthodox Jewish identity is instead signaled by various other means. These means comprise the *indicia* of identification. In the case of orthodox Judaism, they are generally outward signs, notably sartorial markers like the wearing of skullcaps and *tzitzit* for men and particular types of hair-coverings for married women. Such sartorial markers are often elements in a broader sartorial constellation, enabling straightforward visual identification not only of orthodox Jewish identity, but also of belonging to specific subdivisions within the orthodox Jewish world. Crucially, anyone can adopt the sartorial markers of orthodox Judaism, even if they do not meet the *criteria* of Jewish identity. While *indicia* reference social categories, they are not the final arbiters of belonging to these categories. Of course, the *criteria* and *indicia* of identification for any given social category can and do assume very different forms from those that apply to orthodox Jews today; the key point is that identification of social categories is governed by the *indicia* of identity, whereas belonging is governed by their *criteria*.

[85] Horowitz 1975: 119-121; Hall 1997: 20-25. The distinction is articulated in the context of the study of ethnicity, but lends itself with no difficulty to collective identities and to social categories writ large.

The diversity of identification methods is as great as is the diversity of social categories.[86] There are endless cues and constellations of cues that can communicate belonging to a particular category. Many cues are inscribed in the body. This is true in those simple instances where the *criteria* and *indicia* of identification are one and the same, such as when individuals in the category of the "large-nosed" are obliged to have visually verifiable (if subjective) large noses.[87] It is likewise true of more complex social categories, so that systematic scarification among some people can convey a great deal of information about social status and tribal belonging.[88] Because certain features of the human body do not lend themselves readily to modification and are highly visible, there has been a tendency to approach them as particularly rigid indicators of belonging to various social categories. This is evident in the primacy assigned to skin color as a marker of status in Apartheid South Africa and in slave markets like those that once operated in Charleston, Cap-Français, and Rio de Janeiro. Physical cues are regularly combined with other visual markers: in line with the popular dictum

[86] For a selective overview of methods of identification in antiquity, see the studies assembled in Depauw and Coussement (eds.) 2014.

[87] The entire practice of physiognomy is predicated on the notion that there is a direct relationship between one's physical appearance and one's character. For an ancient exponent of this approach, see Aristotle 1938: 526-527 (*Prior Analytics* 2.27): "It is possible to judge men's character from their physical appearance." This idea has had a long afterlife, including its adoption as a tool for assessing moral character at the Ottoman court in the 16th century, for which see Lelić 2017. Physiognomy has also been perpetuated by modern philosophers, notably Arthur Schopenhauer, who penned an entire tract on the subject (*On Physiognomy*). See Schopenhauer 1890: 75: "That the outer man is a picture of the inner, and the face an expression and revelation of the whole character, is a presumption likely enough in itself, and therefore a safe one to go by;" see further Schopenhauer 1890: 82: "The study of physiognomy is one of the chief means of a knowledge of mankind."

[88] Keefer 2013. Scarification is, of course, only one manifestation of body modification to convey information about a person's social status; tattooing is another popular form of body modification. For the social function of tattooing and branding in ancient Mesopotamia, see Ditchey 2016.

that clothes make the man, dress is a very common reference point for identification, as are other signals like hairstyle and accessories. Combinations of visual markers tend to serve as the initial source of information about a person and about the relevant social categories that apply to that person.

Visual markers are supplemented by other factors, among them language and associated features like vocabulary and accent. In the European nationalist tradition, language is regarded as a decisive element in identifying belonging to national groups.[89] So-called dialects[90] are in turn regarded as strong markers of regional attachment, while sociolects, ethnolects, and genderlects index an association with various social groups. As such, a speaker of English might be identified as being from the United Kingdom, while their mode of speech might tie them to Liverpool (Scouse), or to the educated and upper classes (the Queen's English/Received Pronunciation). Even one's voice conveys information, so that the speaker's pitch can, for instance, connote the speaker's sex.[91]

[89] See T. Snyder 2003 for a particularly illuminating study of the formation of certain East European nationalisms. The primacy of language in the construction of Lithuanian nationalism is particularly instructive (T. Snyder 2003: Chapter 2). See Haarmann 1986: 257-258 for the argument that, in point of fact, "the relation between ethnicity and language is not characterized by stable or invariable conditions... Language as such is neither a stable component in a network of ecological variables, nor is it an indispensable element in ethnicity."

[90] The distinction between language and dialect is historically arbitrary and rooted in the interface between culture and politics, rather than constructed on the basis of sound linguistic reasoning. As the Yiddish linguist Max Weinreich famously quipped, "אַ שפּראַך איז אַ דיאַלעקט מיט אַן אַרמיי און פֿלאָט" – a language is a dialect with an army and a navy.

[91] Crone 2003: 105 addresses the role of language in marking social status in the context of pre-industrial societies: "Language, too, was an important status-marker, not only in the sense that educated and uneducated persons spoke different languages or dialects but also in the sense that whatever they spoke, they would have available to them a rich variety of honorifics, modes of address and grammatical forms reflecting the age, sex and social

Behavior is still another source of data. Certain behaviors can be indexed to social categories, so that manifesting them can suggest that a person belongs to a related category. In classical Greek thought, a whole host of undesirable behaviors were associated with slaves; exhibiting these behaviors (or being so accused) could be used as a rhetorical cudgel with which to pommel opponents and impugn their social status.[92] The correlation is clearer with other *indicia*. As a behavioral pattern, for instance, mosque attendance is a solid *indicium* of adherence to Islamic religion. In more popular terms, the dictum "fake it till you make it" suggests that adopting the behaviors and practices of a social group can – given enough time and sufficient skill on the part of the "faker" – enable individuals to pass successfully as members of the target social group.

Beards are a good case study in the functioning of *indicia* of identification. Beards can connote belonging to a great many social categories, beginning with their association with masculinity. Although some women and young males can grow facial hair, full beards are generally associated with adult men; wearing a beard is a clear signal of manhood in almost every context. Depending on their style and appearance, beards today often connote religious affiliation and devotion. There are the full beards of orthodox Christian clergymen, as well as those of observant Sikhs and Haredi Jews; there is the beard with trimmed moustache of those

position of, as well as the degree of intimacy between, the speaker and the person addressed: not only could you tell at a glance who and what a person was, but you also had to acknowledge in your forms of speech whether he was your superior, inferior or peer."

[92] Ober 1989: 270-272.

pious Muslims who seek to emulate the example of their prophet Muhammad (better yet, the beards can be dyed red with henna); and there are the moustacheless beards characteristic of various Anabaptist groups. There are numerous other beards, too. Beards can be statements of conformity with certain fashions, be it the imperial chic of Antonine Rome or the ostensibly counter-cultural chic of the modern hipster subculture. Beards can signal poverty and inadequate access to grooming opportunities, as in the unkempt beards of homeless men. The reservoir of examples is deep: beards can be *indicia* for a veritable panoply of social categories. Critically, however, the interpretation of the beard is always dependent on a broader constellation of *indicia*. The Sikh beard is understood correctly in conjunction with the Sikh turban, the hipster beard is decoded by reference to further aesthetic preferences, and the beard of the destitute is apprehended by way of supplementary marks of privation. The *indicium* can often be understood only through its context, which defines its meaning and interpretation. Like social categories, *indicia* operate as complex constellations.

The complexity of the system of *criteria* and *indicia* can be traced quite clearly in the construction of man and woman as social categories. “Manhood” and “womanhood” have relatively straightforward *criteria*. They are defined in the first order by biology. In principle, men and women have distinct reproductive organs, and in the light of modern science also distinct pairs of chromosomes. This is not to say that there are no ambiguous cases that exist on the fringes of the man-woman dichotomy, or outside of it altogether – like hermaphrodites,

eunuchs, and assorted transgender or gender nonconforming groups; such groups are accommodated by further social categories, as the very act of naming them implies. By contrast, the *indicia* of man and woman as social categories range far beyond biology. Yes, biological markers are important, but these are not always readily apparent and can be concealed behind various garments. Manhood and womanhood are thus signaled by numerous other means. Hairstyle and dress can reference one's sex, so that young children will sometimes mistake a man for a woman because he has long hair, or a woman for a man because she has short hair; similar confusion can be instigated by wearing the characteristic clothing of the other sex. Manifesting the behaviors and practices that are associated with manhood and womanhood likewise communicate belonging to one or the other category; people can be enjoined to "be a man" or to "act like a lady".[93] Some lines of work and social activities[94] can be associated with women, notably looking after young children,[95] while others are firmly in the purview of men.[96] Accordingly, the *criteria* for man and woman as social categories are in practice not simply evidence of conformity with certain biophysical norms;

[93] Clover 1993 argues that Norse mythology constructs femaleness and maleness more through behavior than through biology.

[94] Like two religious festivals from classical antiquity that were for, of, and by women, namely the Thesmophoria and the Bona Dea, for which see Versnel 1992. The play *Women at the Thesmophoria* is an amusing but socially informative comedy set in the Thesmophoria, for which see Aristophanes 2000.

[95] In ancient Mesopotamia, for instance, infants are not represented artistically without the accompanying presence of an invariably female caregiver, pointing to the exclusive association of rearing infants with women. See Valk 2016: 708.

[96] With few exceptions, waging war would be the most obvious.

they are instead an active combination of biology and category-appropriate practices and behaviors, in which the dominant element varies.[97]

What several of these examples suggest is that failing to express the appropriate *indicia* of manhood and womanhood – or exhibiting *indicia* that are not consonant with the pertinent biological sex – undermine a person's belonging to the "man" or "woman" social category, and they do so regardless of what their *criteria* dictate. This implies that the relationship between the *criteria* and *indicia* of identification is dynamic. The *criteria* can be regarded as hewing closely to Aristotelian essentialism, while *indicia* operate more in line with the notion of 'family resemblances' articulated by Wittgenstein;[98] the identification of social categories strives for the former while depending operationally on the latter, resulting in an applied position that sits between the two poles. Social categories are communicated by constellations of *indicia* that are in principle extraneous to the categories themselves, but are not entirely so in practice. The boundaries between *criteria* and *indicia* can be permeable. In the absence of the appropriate *indicia*, it is not possible to identify somebody as belonging to a certain social category even if the technical *criteria* are met. In practice, then, the relationship between *criteria* and *indicia* can be ambiguous: if nobody recognizes your claim to belong to a certain social category and you

[97] In some cases, the biophysical component of the division between man and woman is elided almost entirely. This is apparent in one text from Bronze Age Emar in Syria that describes a man making his daughter both man *and* woman for purposes of legal inheritance. See Arnaud 1987: 233 (text 13, lines 4-6): "I have no son; I have made my daughter Alnašuwa to be a man and a woman." (*māru ul īšū-mi Alnašuwa mārtīa ana zikari u sinništi ētepuš*.)
[98] Wittgenstein 2009: §65-71.

cannot demonstrate it to anybody's satisfaction, are you able to claim that category as your own in a socially meaningful way? Or in the reverse, if you are socially regarded as belonging to a certain social category because you manifest the appropriate *indicia*, are you able to deny this categorization effectively? In such situations, social categorization quickly becomes more about social performance than about inert states of being: the social category is no longer a passive, default condition, but the result of choices (even if these are socially constrained) made both by the social actor and the individuals who are interpreting that actor. To return to an earlier example, an individual who can prove neither matrilineal descent from recognized Jews or conversion under the auspices of recognized rabbinical authorities will be unable to have their claim to a Jewish identity recognized by orthodox Jewish institutions, even if the display of the appropriate *indicia* will allow the individual to pass successfully as a Jew in many orthodox Jewish settings. This is so regardless of the objective truth of the claim to Jewish identity, as measured by their ostensible *criteria*. Categorization draws its social valence from the fact that it is validated by other social actors rather than from any innate value.

In the construction of social worlds, significance can be attached to any one feature or combination of features: our social reality is omnisemantic. Everything can have meaning, and it is up to us – and the societies we are part of – to attach meanings to things, to establish connections between signifier and signified. This process of signification reflects the salient features of any social world, as only those things are signified that are identified as relevant and

important. Because of the inherent potential for anything to have meaning, it is omnisemantism that informs the vast variability of the *indicia* of identification. Simultaneously, the permeability of the boundaries between *criteria* and *indicia* of identification is rooted in the primacy of interpretation in understanding the world. The way one perceives the world to be is often more important than the way the world really is, and it gives shape to how reality is represented in the mind.[99] It is in this sense that *indicia* can be of greater consequence than *criteria* in the operation of social categories. The *indicia* of identification are the features through which social categories are recognized in the world, and the simple act of recognition informs thinking and behavior regardless of the extent to which recognition corresponds to any objective standard.

A final note on the identification of social categories: like social categories themselves, systems of identification operate on the basis of probability. Reading and interpreting *indicia* is often complicated and prone to ambiguity. Not every *indicium* is straightforward, or manifested in its entirety, and it can thus be misread. Likewise, an elaborate constellation of *indicia* might omit one or two elements, or these elements might simply not be discerned by the observer. It is therefore up to the observer to make a determination about a person's social categorization on the basis of a limited selection of *indicia*, producing inconclusive results. Observers are

[99] A practical application of this idea is expressed with elegance and concision by James Rives in his introduction to Tacitus' *Agricola and Germania*, for which see Tacitus 2009: xliii: "People tend to see what they expect to see, and what people expected to see when they encountered Germani was what conventional wisdom about northern barbarians had led them to expect."

obliged to proceed in accordance with the extent to which they think their categorization is likely to be correct; in other words, it is the observer's confidence in their categorization that informs the observer's subsequent actions. Confidence in categorization is undermined by an awareness of the fact that *indicia* can sometimes be subverted and manipulated. The possibility of subversion is what enables people to disguise themselves and to pretend that they belong to social categories to which – per the *criteria* of identification – they do not. There are countless examples of such subversion of *indicia*, among them the many instances of women who have for various reasons attempted to be regarded as men, from the various 19th century female writers who adopted male pen names to Albanian sworn virgins.[100] A starker instance of the logic of subverting *indicia* is expressed by the Roman satirist Juvenal, who writes provocatively that women who want to be regarded as intelligent – a trait that he reserves for the male sex – might as well go all out and adopt the full range of practices associated with males, listing three practices that his Roman audience would have recognized as exclusively male and thus ridiculous and transgressive for a woman to engage in: "The fact of the matter is that the woman who longs to appear excessively clever and eloquent should hitch up a tunic knee-high, sacrifice a pig to Silvanus, and pay just a quarter to enter the baths."[101] In addition to their potential for subversion, *indicia* are also unequal. Not every *indicium* is of equivalent weight in processes of identification, so that in any bundle of *indicia* the absence or presence of a given

[100] For an account of Albanian sworn virgins, see Young 2000.
[101] Lines 445-447 in Satire 6 of Juvenal, in Juvenal, Persius 2004: 276-277.

indicium might be of much greater consequence than the absence or presence of another. Due to the pitfalls of social categorization, the identification and application of social categories always proceeds in degrees of confidence – even if that confidence is sometimes misplaced.

2.3 Collective Identities

2.3.1 From Social Category to Collective Identity

> *Sie unterläßt aber keinen Augenblick, bei den Arbeitern ein möglichst klares Bewußtsein über den feindlichen Gegensatz zwischen Bourgeoisie und Proletariat herauszuarbeiten… die Kommunisten unterstützen überall jede revolutionäre Bewegung gegen die bestehenden gesellschaftlichen und politischen Zustände… Die Kommunisten arbeiten endlich überall an der Verbindung und Verständigung der demokratischen Parteien aller Länder. Die Kommunisten verschmähen es, ihre Ansichten und Absichten zu verheimlichen. Sie erklären es offen, daß ihre Zwecke nur erreicht werden können durch den gewaltsamen Umsturz aller bisherigen Gesellschaftsordnung. Mögen die herrschenden Klassen vor einer kommunistischen Revolution zittern. Die Proletarier haben nichts in ihr zu verlieren als ihre Ketten. Sie haben eine Welt zu gewinnen. Proletarier aller Länder, vereinigt euch!*
>
> [The Communists] never cease, for a single instant, to instill into the working class the clearest possible recognition of the hostile antagonism between bourgeoisie and proletariat… the Communists everywhere support every revolutionary movement

against the existing social and political order of things… They labour everywhere for the union and agreement of the democratic parties of all countries. The Communists disdain to conceal their views and aims. They openly declare that their ends can be attained only by the forcible overthrow of all existing social conditions. Let the ruling classes tremble at a Communistic revolution. The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win. Proletarians of All Lands, Unite!

- *Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, Manifest der Kommunistischen Partei (The Communist Manifesto)*[102]

Collective identities arise out of social categories: the question is when – and why – they do so.[103] Among the many differences that divide social categories is the extent to which those to whom a category applies feel or experience a sense of reciprocal bondedness to others in the same category on the grounds of their belonging to that category. When there is such a sense of bondedness, it becomes possible to speak of a collective identity: category members

[102] Marx and Engels 2012: 102. The final appeal of the *Communist Manifesto* is translated as "Working Men of all Countries, Unite" in Samuel Moore's translation, which often serves as the standard English text because it enjoys Engels' imprimatur – but the original German is "Proletarier aller Länder, vereinigt euch!" Marx is careful to use gender neutral language, so I have amended Moore's translation to the more faithful "Proletarians of all Lands, Unite!" Of course, the popular English rendition is "workers of the world, unite!"

[103] Like social categories, collective identities are therefore cognitive constructs. This is articulated by Assmann 2011: 113-114: "The elements of collective identity are underpinned by factors that are purely symbolic, and the social body is simply a metaphor – an imaginary construct. As such, however, it has its own position in reality. The collective or 'we' identity is the image that a group has of itself and with which its members associate themselves. It therefore has no existence of its own, but comes into being through recognition by its participating individuals. It is as strong or as weak as its presence in the consciousness of its members and its motivating influence on their thoughts and actions."

constitute a self-aware social group with a shared collective identity.[104] Henri Tajfel and John Turner define a social group "as a collection of individuals who perceive themselves to be members of the same social category, share some emotional involvement in this common definition of themselves, and achieve some degree of social consensus about the evaluation of their group and of their membership in it."[105] For Tajfel and Turner, social groups arise when the members of a social category share a mutual recognition of their membership in that category and attach some importance to it. This is a loose definition that evades precision on the number of people required to form a group, on the nature of the recognition of belonging to a shared category, and on the quality of attachment to that category. In this framework, a group could be five individuals, or five million; belonging to a common category may be imposed (we are slaves) or eagerly adopted (we are members of the People's Front of Judea – not the Judean People's Front, heaven forbid, those splitters); attachment to the group can be lackluster (yes I'm Korean but I don't much care), or all-consuming (*dulce et decorum est pro patria mori*). The essential ingredient is that sense of bondedness that is the basis of collective identity, so that Tajfel and Turner's definition of the social group is a sound point of departure for a consideration of collective identities.

[104] Collective identities are here synonymous with the "psychological group" of self-categorization theory, for which see Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, and Wetherell 1987. See A. Smith 2008: 33 for the importance in this process of acquiring a common category name: "it is only when the members begin to know who they collectively are, and feel that they constitute a distinct named community, that one can speak of a process of growing collective self-definition and identification."
[105] Tajfel and Turner 1986: 15.

A key feature of Tajfel and Turner's definition of the social group is its indeterminacy. There is no specificity regarding the intensity, depth, or breadth of group bondedness – only the requirement that there be such bondedness. The practical implication of this approach is that it is not possible to draw a clear dividing line between social categories and collective identities; the distinction between them is often subtle and always subjective. Essentially, collective identities are social categories that induce a sustained sense of *Wirbewusstsein*[106] – collective consciousness – in members of the group that the category describes. Such collective consciousness depends on the development of a sense of otherness that divides those within a category from those outside of it, as the group can only exist in semantic opposition to outsiders. But othering is not enough. While othering suffices to create a sense of difference between those inside and those outside of a category, it does not necessarily lead to social cohesion, to a recognition among those within a category that they form part of a single group and an altering of behavior in a way that demonstrates solidarity among category members. Collective identities arise when a social category foments a sense of significant difference between those inside and outside of it, *and* produces a collective consciousness among category members that is sufficiently deep to generate social cohesion.[107]

[106] See Girtler 1982: 54. *Wirbewusstsein* has also been articulated as *Zusammengehörigkeitsgefühl* – the feeling of belonging together.

[107] Or social solidarity, in line with the terminology and exposition of Durkheim 2013: Book 1, which distinguishes broadly between "mechanical" and "organic" solidarity. Relational connectedness is not essential for the emergence of collective identities, which is identified as one of three pillars of "gorupness" by Brubaker and Cooper 2000: 20-21.

In their study of prosocial intragroup behaviors, Mark van Vugt and Justin Park argue that individuals respond differently when interacting with members of a separate social category than they do when interacting with members of a socially cohesive outgroup: "the contents of psychological responses to groups that fit a 'tribal template' (ethnic groups, nations, sports teams) should be distinct from [the] contents of psychological responses to other kinds of groups (genders, age groups, innies or outies)."[108] In other words, while there are many social categories that establish identifiable outgroups, only some of these categories fit the "tribal template" that generates social cohesion and thus gives rise to collective identity. Some of the examples that van Vugt and Park cite are contestable, but their main point is clear: many social categories rarely if ever qualify as collective identities, while others almost always do. The boundary between the two lies precisely in the problem of social cohesion. Cohesion entails a level of preference for ingroup members. In the absence of ingroup preference, a social category remains just that. There are, for instance, very few social contexts in which "having a belly-button that is an innie" (as per one of the examples of van Vugt and Park) or "having a surname that starts with a letter toward the end of the alphabet" will prompt the development of significant cohesion – even in situations where they are adopted as principles of ordering and differentiation.[109] By contrast, there are many social contexts in which "sharing

[108] van Vugt and Park 2010: 20-21.
[109] Whatever its ability to foment *Wirbewusstsein*, ordering people on an alphabetical last-name basis has measurable consequences. For studies documenting the impact of initials on academic career outcomes and acquisition habits, see Einav and Yariv 2006 and Carlson and Conard 2011 respectively.

(even distant or contrived) ties of kinship" and "being a member of a political community (a citizen)" form the basis of socially cohesive groups.[110] Social cohesion, then, is the elixir that can transubstantiate select social categories into collective identities – but what is its source?

2.3.2 Anchoring the Individual in the Collective

> *Ik zal verhalen van mensen, van wezens die gelyke beweging hebben als wy. 't Is waar, wie aandoening schuwt en vermoeiend mede-lyden ontgaan wil, zal zeggen dat die mensen geel zyn, of bruin – velen noemen ze zwart – en voor dezulken is 't verschil van kleur beweegreden genoeg om hun oog af te keren van die ellende, of ten-minste àls zy er op neerzien, daarop neer te zien zonder aandoening. Myn vertelling is dus alleen gericht aan hen die in-staat zyn tot het moeielyk geloof dat er harten kloppen onder die donkere opperhuid, en dat wie gezegend is met blankheid en de daarmee samengaande beschaving, edelmoedigheid, handels- en Godskennis, deugd… zyn blanke hoedanigheden zou kunnen aanwenden op àndere wyze dan tot nog toe ondervonden werd door wie minder gezegend zyn in huidskleur en zielevoortreffelykheid*.
>
> I shall speak of human beings, of creatures who go through the same motions that we do. It's true, those who eschew emotion and seek to avoid tiresome pity will say that

[110] Turner 1982: 27 hypothesizes that "awareness of common category membership is the necessary and sufficient condition for individuals to feel themselves to be, and act as, a group." While such awareness is certainly necessary, it is not always sufficient, and it is this problem that is addressed implicitly by van Vugt and Park's "tribal template".

these people are yellow, or brown – many call them black – and for them the difference in color is sufficient reason to turn their eye away from that misery, or at least, if they do look, to look without feeling. My tale is therefore addressed only to those who are capable of the difficult belief that hearts beat beneath that dark skin, and that those who are blessed with whiteness and the accompanying civilization, nobility, knowledge of trade and God, virtue… that they might direct their white qualities in a different way than has so far been experienced by those who are less blessed in skin color and exaltedness of spirit.

- *Multatuli, Max Havelaar, of De koffiveilingen der Nederlandsche Handelmaatschappy*[111]

Mais, après tout, la pure nature est bonne, puisque ces gens−ci, au lieu de me manger, m'ont fait mille honnêtetés dès qu'ils ont su que je n'étais pas jésuite.

But human nature in its pure state is good after all, since these people, instead of eating me, were all sweetness and light the minute they knew I wasn't a Jesuit.

- *Voltaire, Candide*[112]

Individuals can be described by any number of social categories, drawn from an endless list of candidates. Although the individual has little direct control over the categories through

[111] Multatuli 2012: 220-221.
[112] Voltaire 2006: 39.

which they are perceived, they do exercise agency over the categories with which they choose to identify. Identifying with categories is not a passive process.[113] It requires action on the part of the individual to accept that a social category applies to them. Until the individual recognizes and embraces that, "why, yes, by golly, I *am* a Catalan," there is no personal identification with that category; at best, there is a passive acquiescence in category membership. If a person does not identify with a category, they are unlikely to adopt the associated behaviors or to internalize the associated stereotypes. Indeed, resistance to having a category ascribed to them might lead an individual to actively distance themselves from the relevant category expectations. This is in stark contrast to identifying with a category, which is associated with a whole suite of consequences and is the first step toward social cohesion.

When individuals identify with a social category, that category becomes an extension of the self, operating as a prism through which individuals understand themselves and their place in society.[114] The contents of the category, at least in general outline, are recognized as applying to the individual, establishing an essential likeness with all other category members. This likeness binds the individual to the other category members, creating the necessary conditions for the development of group bondedness. Identifying with a social category

[113] Brather 2004: 97-98 ties the act of personal identification to the consciousness of social belonging: "Im hier interessierenden Zusammenhang wird unter „Identität" eine bewußte und subjektive Selbst-Zuordnung von Individuen zu einer sozialen Gruppe aufgrund spezifischer Merkmale in bestimmten Situationen verstanden, kurz: das Bewußtsein sozialer Zugehörigkeit(en)."

[114] As per Zerubavel's "optical communities", Zerubavel 1997: 33-34. See also Castells 2009: 7: identities "become identities only when and if social actors internalize them, and construct their meaning around this internalization."

therefore has profound consequences: an individual's categorization is reflected in various ways in their social experience, from their own self-esteem[115] to their sense of their place in the social space and the nature of their relations with outgroup members.[116] As such, individuals have a vested interest in the perception of their category, both in terms of their own self-regard and in terms of their treatment by others. The fortunes of other members of the category reflect on them, and vice versa. An invisible bond forms between category members, who, if the shared category identity is sufficiently developed, begin to function as a social unit. Group coherence can be bolstered by the sense that category members constitute a *Schicksalsgemeinschaft* – a community of fate, in which the destinies of all individuals are inseparably intertwined. Personal identification with a social category is thus the foundation of group psychology. In the words of Reicher and Haslam, "social identity is the psychological mechanism that makes group behavior possible."[117]

[115] For the distinction between collective and personal self-esteem, see Crocker and Luhtanen 1990. For a discussion of different types of self-esteem and their place in Social Identity Theory, see Rubin and Hewstone 1998. For a theoretical overview of research on the relationship between self-regard and regard for one's collective identity, see the section on *Evaluation* in Ashmore, Deux, and McLaughlin-Volpe 2004: 86-87.
[116] See Simon and Klandermans 2001: 321 for a good overview of some of the psychological processes that are associated with collective identity, and the rest of the paper for an account of how collective identities can be politicized. Alongside social benefits, the psychological benefits of category identification are the "valuable thing" that are meant by Eriksen 2010: 39: "For ethnic membership to have a personal importance, it must provide the individual with something he or she considers valuable." The term "category" can stand in place of the term "ethnic" in this passage.
[117] Reicher and Haslam 2010: 296.

The development of social solidarity is predicated on individuals identifying themselves as members of the group;[118] without such collective identification, there can be no group solidarity.[119] There are numerous mechanisms that enable the emergence of collective identity out of many single acts of identification with a category. These mechanisms have received a great deal of experimental attention and have been theorized extensively, notably in social identity theory and self-categorization theory.[120] One key insight of such research has been that identification breeds attraction. John Turner notes that "once individuals define themselves or are defined by others as members of a category, there will be strong motivational pressures for them to assume that its characteristics are positive and even reinterpret as positive those designated as negative by outsiders."[121] It is not only the contents of a category that are viewed with greater positivity, but also its members.[122] In practical terms, this is most clearly manifest in pronounced and measurable tendencies among human beings to favor ingroup members over outsiders.[123] The very act of identification with a social category appears to increase the

[118] Although the distinction between relational and categorical modes of identification suggested by Brubaker and Cooper 2000: 15 is useful, they can both produce collective identities. It is therefore unnecessary to pursue this distinction here.
[119] Reicher and Haslam 2010: 293: "Solidarity is rooted in psychological group membership."
[120] For a useful and concise overview of social identity theory and self-categorization theory, consult Hornsey 2008. For a good overview of the relevant psychological phenomena and a review of some early experimental research, see Turner 1982 and Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, and Wetherell 1987: Chapter 5. For a recent and thorough attempt to systematize the insights of the various research traditions and approaches, see Ashmore, Deux, and McLaughlin-Volpe 2004.
[121] Turner 1982: 27-28.
[122] Tyler 2011: 33: "people also develop favorable dispositions toward the group and its members."
[123] See Everett, Faber, and Crockett 2015 for a review of the experimental evidence of and theoretical work on ingroup favoritism.

attractiveness of other category members, and their appeal is heightened by virtue of their being in the same category rather than by virtue of individual merit.[124] Through such processes, social category identification functions as a catalyst for the generation of close ties with and sympathy for one's fellow category members.

Individual acts of personal identification are, then, the building blocks of group formation and social cohesion. The social utility of personal identification with a category is unambiguous, even beyond its role in constructing the self-image of the individual and in clarifying their place in the social space. Identifying with a social category is a pillar of the cooperative, prosocial behaviors that underpin human societies. In the words of Tom Tyler, "people are motivated by the desire to support groups with which they have identity-based and emotional ties… people develop favorable attitudes toward a group, link their values to the group, and act cooperatively."[125] Individual acts of identification with a category beget bondedness with fellow category members; bondedness with fellow category members begets collective identity; collective identity begets social cohesion and cooperative, prosocial behaviors; and cooperative, prosocial behaviors are likely to produce the sorts of social structures that can generate new acts of personal identification with the category or intensify

[124] Hogg 1996: 73: "interpersonal attraction has been shown to be neither sufficient or necessary for group formation, and social attraction is clearly a consequence of group formation."
[125] Tyler 2011: 162. See also Tyler 2011: 1: "The extent to which people are motivated to act on behalf of others, cooperating with groups, organizations, and societies, rather than pursuing self-interested objectives, is defined by the nature and strength of people's social connections to others."

existing ones. This is the virtuous circle of identity, where aggregated individual acts of identification underpin the psychological structures that enable sustained cooperation between humans and create the conditions for the persistence and perpetuation of particular social groups, whose success enables them to retain members and attract new ones. It is precisely this success that allows collective identities to exert such a powerful influence over the social world.[126]

Collective identity dynamics are subject to the same mechanisms that govern the operation of social categories. The preceding analysis of the complexity of social categories therefore applies in equal measure to collective identities.[127] Among the more prominent complications is the multiplicity of collective identity: just as an individual can be described by many social categories simultaneously, so too can an individual identify with many categories at one and the same time. A person can identify as Frisian, Dutch, European, and Western; as Calvinist, Christian, and monotheistic; as conservative, a woman, and a mother. The identity that prevails is entirely dependent on the character of the interaction in which the identity is invoked, as is the accompanying extension of in-group status to different people. One study, for instance, demonstrates the fluidity of in-group status by noting that when different identities

[126] And therefore makes them compelling objects of study for historians and social scientists, as per Brather 2004: 98: "Für den Historiker und Sozialwissenschaftler sind vor allem die Gruppenidentitäten relevant. Denn diese sind es, die für historische Entwicklungen von Gesellschaften eine wichtige Rolle spielen."
[127] Ashmore, Deux, and McLaughlin-Volpe 2004 offers an overview of many of the theoretical problems involved in the functioning of social categories, but does so in the context and language of collective identities; this is indicative of the extent of operational overlap.

are made salient, different in-groups result.[128] The study finds that heightening the salience of an individual's identity as the supporter of a particular football club increases the likelihood that they will extend help to fellow supporters of that club, while there is no increased likelihood that they will come to the assistance of supporters of other clubs. When the salience of their identity as generic football supporters is stressed, there is an increased likelihood that individuals will help fellow football supporters regardless of their club of choice, while there is no corresponding increase in the probability that they will aid those who are not football aficionados. Context is king: different situations stress different identities, and the salience of any one identity rises and falls accordingly.

The more an individual identifies with a social category, the stronger the individual's attachment to and investment in the social group is likely to be. Acts of personal identification have many distinct motivations. Primary among these is the process of social formation, the socialization that an individual undergoes throughout their lives, but especially in their formative early years. Social formation describes how individuals learn from their social environment that they belong to particular social categories and social groups, each with their own expected behaviors and practices, to which the individual is expected to conform. These categories also occupy their own space in the social world, so that individuals learn how they relate to people in different categories. Individuals are habituated to their social roles, and

[128] Levine, Prosser, Evans, and Reicher 2005.

habit generally inculcates identification with the relevant categories.[129] Other acts of identification demand greater agency, in the sense that they require an individual to act contrary to their socialization and identify with new categories. The reasons for such acts of identification can be traced to any of many social-psychological causes, such that each individual instance should be evaluated on its own merit.[130] Nevertheless, the pertinent factors tend to relate to alienation from categories into which an individual was socialized, or a positive attraction to another category; alienation and positive attraction can both be rooted in a desire for social advancement, as well as in a desire to belong to a category that is more suited to a person's individual dispositions or relationships than whatever categories they had previously been socialized into. Category change can be inhibited by the *criteria* determining membership in target categories: no matter how socially advantageous it might be, a slave cannot all of a sudden decide that he is an aristocrat and have that claim validated socially, as the slave has neither the requisite pedigree nor the requisite capital; nor can an Afro-Brazilian decide to be a Euro-Brazilian in order to further their social advancement, as inalterable physiological markers render this transition impossible. Sometimes, category change demands the construction of

[129] For an extended consideration of *habitus*, see Bourdieu 1990: 52-65. For a consideration of social identity formation, see Bourdieu 2013: 93, which considers the process through the example of an adolescent's sexual identity. MacKinnon and Heise 2010: 188-189 distinguish between role relationships and social categories, regarding the former as situationally specific and qualified by the latter.

[130] See Tajfel 1974: 69-70 for a useful overview of the reasons why individuals seek to change their group identity, the limits to their ability to do so, and other possible actions that individuals can pursue when group change is desirable but not feasible. See Ellemers, Spears, and Doosje 2002 for a proposed taxonomy that classifies the various motives informing acts of group identification.

altogether new categories, which work to create a social and taxonomical space for nascent groups that did not previously have an adequate social address.[131] Such new categories often face significant opposition, and the struggle that accompanies their creation reflects the struggle of aspiring groups for social recognition; it is also in the course of this struggle that a new category's relational status vis-à-vis other groups begins to consolidate, as do the contours of its socio-semantic space.

Social cohesion, then, arises when a sufficient number of individuals identify with the same social category. It is the intensity of such identification that determines whether a social category can be deemed to function as a collective identity. Words like "sufficient" and "deemed" indicate that a large degree of subjectivity is involved in evaluating the claim of a given social category to recognition as a collective identity. This ambiguity cannot be overcome without the imposition of rigid classificatory typologies, an approach that does not do justice to the complexity of the subject. Suffice it to say that while ambiguity is inescapable, deciding whether any one category should or should not be regarded as a collective identity is a purely heuristic assessment with no practical implications for the theory of collective identity presented here. The psychological consequences of social cohesion are, as has been noted,

[131] There are countless historical examples of such redefinitions, on both the micro- and macro-scales. In the former category one can look to the modern successes of the gay rights movement, while in the latter category the restructuring of the global social and political order according to the principles of nationalism and the nation-state over the last 300 years represents the triumph of a new set of categories and a new mode of constructing collectives.

wide-ranging and significant – both for individuals and, more importantly, for social groups. Social cohesion facilitates cooperation between strangers[132] by building on ingroup preference, mobilizing individuals to favor each other, trust each other, and work cooperatively in pursuit of common ends. This view is by no means new. It is echoed in the concept of *'aṣabiyyah* that is so central to the work of the 14th century proto-sociologist Ibn Khaldun. As Ibn Khaldun puts it, "group feeling (*'aṣabiyyah*) produces the ability to defend oneself, to offer opposition, to protect oneself, and to press one's claims. Whoever loses it is too weak to do any of these things."[133]

2.3.3 Collective Identity and the Social Order

> *Everyone in politics must be free of illusions and must keep in mind one fundamental reality – the inescapable, unending struggle of group against group.*
>
> - *Max Weber*[134]

Social cohesion is the product of many aggregated acts of individual identification with a social category, and the more intense these acts are the better. It nevertheless remains the case that some social categories lend themselves much more readily to eliciting acts of individual identification than others. Consequently, some categories are also that much more

[132] It can also facilitate such cooperation among acquaintances and people who know each other well. An isolated band of hunter-gatherers can still appeal to the common "human" social category/collective identity to facilitate cooperation.
[133] Ibn Khaldûn 1967: 111.
[134] Weber 2013: 9. This is from a speech by Max Weber and is cited by his translator R. I. Frank.

likely to generate social cohesion and to give rise to collective identities. Indeed, social categories can only develop into viable collective identities when they mirror the prevailing patterns of social organization or have the potential to reconstitute those patterns. The alphabetical ordering of one's surname and the character of one's belly-button are not the basis of any social order, nor is it conceivable that such categories could ever shoulder that burden: they simply do not relate meaningfully to the salient divisions in any social system.[135] Accordingly, they exercise highly constrained or no appeal to individual acts of identification and are therefore unable to stimulate or sustain social cohesion. If the nature of one's belly-button conveys no meaningful data about one's social status or one's social relations, then there is no incentive to identify with it. To the extent that attempts are made to elevate categories like surname initials and belly-button type to the status of a collective identity, they are doomed to failure. This is precisely because they do not reflect the actual social order, nor can society be reorganized in line with them. As Stephen Reicher and S. Alexander Haslam contend, "an identity that has no possibility of forming a basis for organizing the world… is useless and will therefore be rejected as such."[136] There is an inescapable correlation between the role of a social category in structuring society and its ability to invite individual acts of identification, generate social cohesion, and sustain a collective identity. Because the number

[135] Consistent with this position, Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, and Wetherell 1987: 141 argue that category salience – the basis for the emergence of collective consciousness – is a function of the actual distribution of social bonds and thus reflects genuine sociopolitical divisions.
[136] Reicher and Haslam 2010: 302.

of socially determinant social categories is limited, the overwhelming majority of categories never develop into enduring or meaningful identities.

It is those social categories that structure society or have the potential to do so that can sustain collective identities.[137] These categories mark the salient social cleavages in a social system, dividing between the various in- and outgroups that serve as the system's dominant antipodes. The character of these social cleavages varies, of course, but different kinds are broadly familiar. Among these are categories like class, religion, and ethnicity, to name but a few. In the age of nationalism, categories relating to "nationality" – in its many guises – have been central to the creation and organization of social structures around the world. These categories have inspired great swathes of humanity to identify with them, often at feverish intensity, and have thus spawned a great many collective identities. In the age of the great monotheisms that preceded the rise of nationalism, societies in much of Eurasia were structured by categories associated with religion, principally in the form of the many varieties of Islam and Christianity. For all their differences in meaning and use, concepts like heathen and infidel, Christendom and *Dar al-Islam*, and *Jihad* and Crusade indicate the primacy of religion in

[137] These categories constitute a conceptually broader but functionally similar view of what Fredrik Barth regards as "superordinate statuses", which he confines to ethnic identities, sex, and rank. See Barth 1969: 17: "In other words, regarded as a status, ethnic identity is superordinate to most other statuses, and defines the permissible constellations of statuses, or social personalities, which an individual with that identity may assume. In this respect ethnic identity is similar to sex and rank, in that it constrains the incumbent in all his activities, not only in some defined social situations."

defining in- and outgroups during the millennium between the life of Muhammad and the dawning of the Enlightenment.[138]

Although certain kinds of categories are dominant in certain societies at certain times, this does not mean that there are not simultaneously other categories at work. During the Cold War, for instance, the nation was the paramount basis for the organization of societies, with the nation state functioning as the basic political unit. Nationality, was, however, by no means the only cleavage: the Cold War was itself articulated largely as a conflict between two opposing political philosophies, while each nation state was beset by many further cleavages – some highly particular in character, others much more universal in orientation. Collective identities arose on the basis of all of these fractures, so that in the Spanish nation state of general Francisco Franco there were Castilians (Spaniards proper), but also Basques, Catalans, and Galicians; there were Catholics as well as atheists; and there were communists and anarchists alongside Falangists. This cross-section of collective identities (some more fully developed than others) is far from exhaustive. Even if it were comprehensive, however, it does not account directly for further social cleavages that did not coalesce as readily into coherent collective identities in Franco's Spain, though they may have had the potential to do so. Among these are divisions between rich and poor, between rural and urban, and between men and

[138] Such differences were also marked within Christendom. Following the Reformation, the Peace of Augsburg, for example, prescribed that the religious convictions of the ruling authority in a given German principality should dictate the religious convictions of the people living under its jurisdiction; this is the principle of *cuius regio, eius religio*, and again points to the centrality of religion in structuring the sociopolitical order.

women. For all that people were aware of such differences, they elicited fewer acts of identification and generated little social cohesion. The broader point is that even in a social landscape that is structured primarily by a certain kind of category (the nation, in this case), many other kinds of categories continue to exist and to produce collective identities, or patiently await their opportunity to do so. How identities interact and intersect is a complicated business, not least due to their situational and composite character (and that of the social categories that are their basis). Most collective identities draw on elements from numerous social cleavages, a multiplicity that is often elided by conceptualizing the identity as a whole in the framework of one particular kind of category. Accordingly, the Spanish Civil War facilitated the entanglement of "national" collective identities with identities derived from other social cleavages, regardless of the extent to which these identities actually overlapped. The Castilian collective identity was thus associated with Catholicism and a conservative-Falangist outlook, while the Catalan collective identity was associated with atheism and anarchism-communism. This is despite the fact that there was no one-to-one correspondence between any of these identities, either in the social space or in their conceptual makeup. Such complexity is inescapable and rooted in the complexity of social worlds; any attempt to disentangle the many threads that comprise the social fabric must be rooted in the particularities of the societies that produced them. In the words of Bruce Routledge, "collective identities are everywhere

profoundly historical, discursively constituted, and strategically embedded in cultural, social and political contexts."[139]

The primacy of historical and contextual particularity is evident in the fortunes of one of the universal social cleavages, namely the biological division between female and male. Despite the universality of man and woman as social categories, they seldom appear to generate significant levels of social cohesion[140] and therefore seldom sustain collective identities.[141] In most historical societies, few social categories are of greater consequence than male and female in the determination of social roles and expectations. Male and female govern not only reproductive roles, but also have major implications for what work the individual can do, how they must dress, how they ought to behave, and so on. And yet it is vanishingly rare for large bodies of men or women to sustain cooperation primarily on the basis of being women or men, and thus to generate significant social cohesion and an associated collective identity. This can be explained in numerous ways, and not least by reference to the fact that women and men are socially interdependent, coming together both for reproductive purposes and in family units, so

[139] Routledge 2003: 214.
[140] This may be because with few exceptions (the modern West foremost among them), the exercise of social dominance by males has not been seriously challenged. Interestingly, modern movements for women's rights have provoked the formation of men's rights movements, even if these are largely marginal. It is also worth noting that there are many small, quotidian acts that serve to reinforce male social dominance, as well as institutional inequalities in labor roles, both in the household and in the workforce; taken as a whole, such acts and inequalities can be regarded as symptomatic of an unspoken solidarity among men engaged in the common subjection of women. The roots of this tacit solidarity are explored in Naomi Alderman's novel *The Power* (2017), which inverts the history of male dominance.
[141] Cf. Fuhse 2009: 66.

that in most circumstances it is difficult for collective identities that build mainly on the opposition of man and woman to endure. Historically, there have been few opportunities for women to come together and establish the bonds that underpin concerted social action. Even if such collective identities tend not to materialize, this is not to say that they cannot be conceptualized: after all, the necessary ingredients for a collective identity are certainly present. Striking recognition of the potential for "women" to mobilize as a coherent collective identity can already be found in Greek tales of Amazons, and in the comedies of the Athenian playwright Aristophanes, who wrote 2,400 years ago. Such mobilization forms the central conceit of three of Aristophanes' surviving plays, namely *Lysistrata*, *Women at the Thesmophoria*, and *Assemblywomen*.[142] The preeminent example of the effective mobilization of women as a collective identity is, however, modern. Over the course of the last two centuries, suffragettes, feminists, and others have mobilized on the basis of their belonging to the social category "women", generating and sustaining corresponding collective identities.[143] This is a historically and contextually contingent phenomenon that appears to supersede whatever social processes have otherwise prevented women from engendering their own collective identity. Crucially, suffragettes and feminists have mobilized as women explicitly in order to address imbalances in the distribution of power, opportunity, and other resources (it is worth noting, incidentally, that Aristophanes also envisions his women's movements as acting

[142] Aristophanes 2000 and 2002.
[143] This is a "project identity" according to the model of Castells 2009: 8.

to fix perceived social ills). In other words, these movements leverage "women" as a collective identity to advance the social position of individuals in their social category. This points to what is perhaps the main issue: the bond between social categories and the distribution of power.

2.4 Social Categories and the Distribution of Power

2.4.1 Socially Determinant Categories and Social Capital

> *Every man is a king so long as he has someone to look down on*.
>
> - *Sinclair Lewis, It Can't Happen Here*[144]
>
> Poverty: *If you get your wish, you'll not be the better for it, I assure you. Because if Wealth regains his sight and shares himself out equally, absolutely no one will practice the arts and crafts, and once these vanish from your midst, who will want to do smithing or ship building or tailoring or wheelwrighting or shoemaking or bricklaying or laundering or tanning? Who will want to till the soil with ploughshares and reap Deo's bounty, once you can live idly and ignore all this?*
> Chremylus: *That's nonsense, because everything you counted off just now will be the slaves' jobs.*
>
> - *Aristophanes, Wealth*[145]

[144] Lewis 2014: 157.
[145] Lines 510-517 in Aristophanes 2002: 500-501.

As was noted previously, there are only a limited number of socially determinant categories in any given social system. Because of their ability to structure the social order,[146] it is these categories that can sustain collective identities. They mark the salient social divisions, and they are imbued with significant social consequences. In the modern world of nation states, citizenship determines a great many things: it matters whether you are Russian or Polish, Australian or Indonesian, Mexican or US American. Among its many implications, citizenship has tremendous repercussions for where in the world a person can travel, work, and live freely, as well as for the treatment they can expect to receive in different places. Similarly, in the medieval world of religious communities, it matters whether you are Sunni or Shia, Orthodox or Catholic, Christian, Muslim, Jewish, or something else altogether. In medieval Barcelona and Cairo, religious affiliation is a critical co-determinant of a person's professional opportunities, rights, and obligations. This social resonance does not apply to stamp-collectors, for instance, or to other categories of minor social importance. While the stamp collector category has great purchase at a stamp collectors' convention, it does not resonate outside of such circumscribed settings. Socially determinant categories, by contrast, resonate widely, though not universally. In the modern USA, race resonates in most contexts, from policing to bank loan policies and

[146] The capacity to structure the social order is inseparable from the notion of "power systems", as per Giddens 1985: 8: "All social systems, in other words, can be studied as incorporating or expressing modes of domination and it is this concept more than any other that provides the focal point for the investigation of power. Social systems that have some regularized existence across time-space are always 'power systems', or exhibit forms of domination, in the sense that they are comprised of relations of autonomy and dependence between actors or collectivities of actors."

social expectations; this is the case even when race is not the primary category determining the framework of a given interaction. When social categories have such profound and extensive implications, they can generate many individual acts of identification and heighten their intensity, thereby instigating the coalescence of collective identities.

Individuals have a vested interest in the socially determinant categories to which they belong. Because of the importance of these categories, members stand to gain and to lose in line with the relative position of their category within the broader social scheme. The better the status of women or citizens within a society, the better the situation of individual women or citizens is likely to be. Gains and losses related to membership in a social category range from the individual's sense of self-worth to the activities they can engage in and their access to various social and material resources. These gains and losses are oppositional, dividing between insiders and outsiders, haves and have-nots. The exclusion of women from various occupations is opposed to the inclusion of men; the rights of citizens are opposed to the withholding of these rights from non-citizens. Belonging to a socially determinant category thus encloses the individual within a delimited social space.[147] The boundaries of this social space are those of the group, so that relations with outsiders are largely preset, while it is within the group that the

[147] This is echoed by Zerubavel 1991: 2: "Every class system presupposes a fundamental distinction between personal features that are relevant for placing one in a particular social stratum (for example, occupation, color of skin, amount of formal education) and those that are not (for example, sexual attractiveness, height, intelligence)… By the same token, membership in particular social categories qualifies us for, or disqualifies us from, various benefits, exemptions, and jobs."

individual can strive for social advancement and look for protection and succor. Since the fortunes of individuals are inextricably linked to the fortunes of other category comembers, the sense of shared destiny helps to reinforce group bonds. Again, this dynamic is complicated by the simultaneous interaction of multiple categories, so that the individual's social space is further delimited by membership in other categories: a citizen's sex is important, as is a woman's citizenship (or lack thereof), while other categories will also intervene, depending on the context. Even so, socially determinant categories structure this complex interface of category memberships and bring an element of clarity to the social map.

The oppositional character of socially determinant categories marks out differentiated access to much of the social space. Members of different categories have access to different social networks, differ in their ability to engage in social activities and economic pursuits, and do not draw on the same reservoirs of social prestige. These social disparities amount to imbalances in the distribution of social capital.[148] Here, I define social capital expansively as the aggregate of a person's or group's social relationships and the resulting matrix of sympathy,

[148] For early theories of social capital, see Bourdieu 1986: 248-252 and Coleman 1988. For a fuller, critical account that incorporates theoretical advances since the 1980s, see Portes 2010: Chapter 3. For a critique of the concept of social capital – albeit one that is based on a narrow political perspective – see Blakeley 2002, which prefers the concept of "civil society". A more comprehensive critique from an economic perspective is that of Robison, Schmid, and Siles 2002, for whom the concept of *sympathy* is central to social capital, which they define as follows: "Social capital is a person's or group's sympathy toward another person or group that may produce a potential benefit, advantage, and preferential treatment for another person or group of persons beyond that expected in an exchange relationship."

opportunity, and authority that these relationships produce.[149] For the individual, such imbalances are generally a function of category membership rather than personal accomplishment.[150] In the caste system of the Indian subcontinent, for instance, being born into what is in modern parlance called a "Scheduled Caste" gravely diminishes the quality of the social capital available to an individual, as Scheduled Castes exist in a position of inelastic social inferiority relative to other castes. Members of Scheduled Castes are excluded from participation in any number of social relationships and activities, and consequently from a host of social opportunities.[151] Comparably rigid relationships between category membership and social capital is characteristic of many social systems, such as the racialized hierarchy of Spanish rule in the Americas, which divided between Europeans, natives, Africans, and various other subcategories and intermediate categories. In that system, Spaniards and their descendants enjoyed privileged access to qualitatively superior social capital and its associated benefits. Imbalances in the distribution of social capital diminish or enhance the social power of particular social categories. In the long run, this can produce social categories that suffer

[149] This definition subsumes much of the conceptual space that is defined as cultural capital by Bourdieu 1986: 243-248. It thus collapses the non-material forms of capital conceived by Bourdieu into a single category. This is not to deny that there are important differences as outlined by Bourdieu, but simply to state that these differences are not germane to the present argument because they all arise from and pertain to social relations. They can thus be regarded as variant elements of a single form of capital, namely social capital.

[150] Personal accomplishment has been understood as its own form of capital, namely human capital, comprising an individual's skills, education, health, and comparable factors influencing their productive capacity. This form of capital can determine the individual's opportunities within the parameters of their social category, or to pursue category change. See Becker 1993: Chapter 2.

[151] See Waughray 2010 for an overview of continued discrimination against Scheduled Caste members in India and the problematics surrounding their legal definition.

systematic and enduring deprivation of social capital – social poverty – alongside categories that enjoy a systematic and enduring abundance of social capital – social prosperity. In situations of social poverty, individuals in the affected categories can still be materially and socially prosperous, but category members as a whole have far fewer social resources relative to people in other categories. Equally, in situations of social prosperity individuals can be materially and socially deprived, but they will nevertheless retain the benefits of categorical association with social networks and other forms of social capital that facilitate their personal advancement and enhance their opportunities. The social capital that is available to the individual is also contextually determined. Being a Spaniard in Spanish America is a plus, but much of the associated social capital is not transferrable outside of Spanish America. Non-transferability of social capital between distinct social worlds is generally a given, as social capital is rooted in particular social systems.

Where there is social poverty, members of disadvantaged categories are likely to desire category change. Simultaneously, members of advantaged categories are likely to be unwilling to dilute their advantages by extending them too readily to outsiders. Category change is constrained at both ends of the process. At one end, inertia, habit, social pressure, and the prospect of advancement within the constraints of one's own category all work to dissuade the disadvantaged from pursuing category change. At the other end, membership in socially prosperous categories can be restricted by the erection of rigid barriers to membership, like ties

of kinship, mastery of complex cultural codes, high material entrance costs, and physiological markers. When a social category is also a collective identity, social imbalances are prone to catalyze ongoing efforts by members of socially deprived categories to improve the standing of their category; when category membership has not coalesced into a collective identity, members are instead liable to seek to transfer from one category to another insofar as this is possible. The engines of category change are individual human agents, but the desire for change is formulated in the realm of social categories. Existing elements in the social landscape are emphasized, reconfigured, and mobilized to challenge the prevailing order.[152] By tinkering with the existing system of social categories, such challenges are in essence a symbolic contest over the construction of the social space. The symbolic quality of social categories and their composite character lends itself to manipulation, especially by elites with privileged access to capital.[153]

[152] As van den Berghe 1981: 27 observes, "Ethnicity can be *manipulated* but not *manufactured*." Read "social categories" for "ethnicity".

[153] Echoing Blanton and Fargher 2009: 146, who ask "what groups or categories of social actors were the sources of innovative practices in the construction of collective polities?" Smith 2009 argues that it is elites who "propose and promote" the idea of the nation; see especially Smith 2009: 19: "ethnosymbolists are less concerned with studying everyday, popular national practices for their own sakes than in exploring how popular beliefs, memories and cultures have influenced the views and actions of the elites as they first propose and then promote the idea of the nation; and conversely, how far the various ideas and proposals of nationalist elites have struck a chord among the different strata of the designated populations whom they seek to mobilise and empower." See also Gillett 2000: 6: "More recent thought, though retaining the central conception of ethnicity as socially constructed and able to be instrumentally modified, has modulated this utilitarian view by positing the existence of subjective, culturally replicated ethnic identities existing prior to social manipulation, and constructed from a range of criteria which defy prescriptive definition."

The relationship between categories is not a simple vertical hierarchy, with the top category enjoying abundant social capital and the others following in a descending scale down to the bottom, where social capital is rare and hard to come by. Although such social structures can and do sometimes exist, this simple model elides a great deal of complexity. Different categories have their own reservoirs of social capital, which can be strong in some areas and deficient in others. As an example, Chinese communities in southeast Asia have enjoyed relative material success, but are generally socially subordinate to other groups;[154] as a result, these communities have been vulnerable to violent despoliation and political marginalization despite (and in part because of) their material prosperity. As a social category and collective identity, then, the Chinese in southeast Asia abound in social capital relating to access to the means and fruits of production, but are often inadequately provisioned with the kind of social capital that translates into the efficacious exercise or mobilization of physical force. It is therefore not possible to fit such a category comfortably into any vertical hierarchy of privilege, and such difficulties are present in the reconstruction of any social system.[155]

[154] See Suryadinata 1987 for a very basic overview of the demographic distribution and economic and political conditions of Chinese communities in southeast Asia.

[155] Contra the vertical and ultimately dualistic scheme proposed by Marx and Engels for the modern period in *The Communist Manifesto*. Marx and Engels 2012: 74: "In the earlier epochs of history, we find almost everywhere a complicated arrangement of society into various orders, a manifold gradation of social rank. In ancient Rome we have patricians, knights, plebeians, slaves; in the Middle Ages, feudal lords, vassals, guild-masters, journeymen, apprentices, serfs; in almost all of these classes, again, subordinate gradations. The modern bourgeois society that has sprouted from the ruins of feudal society has not done away with class antagonisms. It has but established new classes, new conditions of oppression, new forms of struggle in place of the old ones. Our epoch, the epoch of the bourgeoisie, possesses, however, this distinct feature: it has simplified class antagonisms. Society as a whole is more and more splitting up into two great hostile camps, into two great classes directly facing each other—

2.4.2 Struggling over Categories, Struggling for Power

ΕΡΜΗΣ: πατρὶς γάρ ἐστι πᾶσ᾽ ἵν᾽ ἂν πράττῃ τις εὖ

Hermes: One's country is wherever one does well.

- *Aristophanes, Wealth*[156]

Power is derived from the ability to exercise control over one's social and material environment. Exercising social control entails the ability to compel others to do your bidding, whereas exercising mastery over material resources entails the ability to control how economic capital is used and distributed. These abilities arise from the possession and deployment of social and economic capital, which are mutually reinforcing and interdependent, with neither enjoying universal precedence over the other.[157] Control of economic capital is vulnerable without the social capital to secure it, and collective social capital is unsustainable without

Bourgeoisie and Proletariat." Many others have taken up this Manichean reading of history, including recently Hardt and Negri 2009: 45.

[156] Line 1151 in Aristophanes 2002: 588-589.

[157] The Marxist approach has often been dismissed as excessively materialistic, focusing on the role of economic capital to the exclusion of social capital. This is, for instance, the view of Bourdieu 1985: 736: "The inadequacies of the Marxist theory of classes, in particular its inability to explain the set of objectively observed differences, stems from the fact that, in reducing the social world to the economic field alone, it is forced to define social position solely in terms of position in the relations of economic production and consequently ignores positions in the different fields and sub-fields, particularly in the relations of cultural production, as well as all the oppositions that structure the social field, which are irreducible to the opposition between owners and non-owners of the means of economic production. It thereby secures a one-dimensional social world, simply organized around the opposition between two blocs." In fairness to Marx's exposition on "primitive accumulation" (for which see Marx 1990: Part Eight), he does not exclude the possibility that social capital is of equal importance to its economic counterpart; he simply focuses on the formative role of inequality in access to economic capital in the shaping of social relations once this inequality arises. Weber is also sensitive to factors beyond the merely material, speaking of class, status, group, and party as the bases of political power. See Weber 1978: 926-939.

secure material foundations. Wielding power is thus governed by access to both social and economic capital, each of them enabling the acquisition of the other, so that neither has ultimate priority. Because power exists in relation to the social world, its distribution is inseparable from social phenomena, and, indeed, from the distribution of social capital. Likewise, because access to social capital is conditioned by membership in socially determinant categories, there exists an insuperable bond between social categories and the distribution of power.

Social capital is embedded in socially determinant categories, and control of social capital is wedded to control of economic capital. Socially determinant categories are thus fundamental to the distribution of power. As the preceding discussion suggested, this establishes a strong interest in category membership and in category boundaries;[158] this interest arises from a desire to protect, partake in, or challenge the social and material benefits that inhere in belonging to certain categories. In turn, the vested interest in social categories creates conditions that foster the consolidation of collective identities. In a world of social categories, collective identities signal those categories that have a direct relationship to the distribution of power. When collective identities are eagerly adopted (permeable boundaries

[158] Barth 1969 emphasizes the importance of boundaries in group construction, albeit in the context of ethnicity. Barth's approach is refined by Eriksen 2010: 46-49, which makes clear that "the concept of ethnic boundary places the focus of ethnic studies on the relationship between groups. The boundary is that invisible dividing line between them. Boundaries are generally two-way; that is to say, both groups in a relationship demarcate their identity and distinctiveness vis-à-vis the other." For the term "ethnicity" in the cited passage, read instead "social". Eisenstadt and Giesen likewise point to the importance of boundaries, but emphasize symbolic codes of distinction and the formative role of elite "carrier groups". See Eisenstadt and Giesen 1995: 74-77.

permitting), they indicate an actual or potentially positive relationship with capital (social and/or economic). An individual who can embrace a Roman identity, for example, does so because it permits partaking in the benefits of *Romanitas* in a framework dominated by Rome. Equally, an individual in third century Rome might adopt a Christian identity because access to the social capital accumulated by early Christians was appealing.[159] The appeal of the kind of category represented by early Christianity was rooted in its challenge to the established social framework, so that becoming a Christian was especially attractive to people from categories that were disadvantaged in the existing framework and to whom Christianity therefore offered new prospects of social advancement.[160] Ascribed categories do not have the same power to generate collective identity unless they are adopted by category members as vehicles through which to instigate collective action. Nevertheless, they also express a relationship to the distribution of power, namely one of alienation. In the Roman world, "slaves" are characterized by their status as unfree, and are thus formally excluded from the rights and social capital that are concomitant with freedom. As generic outsiders, "barbarians" are similarly characterized by

[159] This is not to say that Christianity was adopted without conviction and without regard for the intellectual or emotional appeal of the Christian message – on the contrary, the power of conviction and emotional and intellectual appeal are part and parcel of social capital. Moreover, the Christian message was mediated by people representing broader social networks, and the message, insofar as one can speak of any single, coherent message, cannot be separated from the social context in which it was propounded. Once Christianity as a category accumulated enough social capital, its adoption generated its own exponential momentum as a challenge to the established distribution of power. See Rogers 1983 for a theory of the diffusion of innovation that can be extended to early Christianity, as was attempted by Montgomery 2002.

[160] See Dunning 2009 for an overview of the early Christian self-perception as existing beyond conventional social categories and as constituting a challenge to the established social order. See Trebilco 2017 for efforts by early Christians to draw their own category boundaries and define outsiders.

their social distance from the Roman social world, and thus by their alienation from the social capital that is associated with familiarity with this world. Be they ascribed social categories or embraced collective identities, the groups described by the relevant labels reflect a relationship between the category and the distribution of power.

The relationship between social categories and power is further evident in struggles over the definition of the categories themselves. To secure control of the social capital that inheres in category membership, rivals within the same category can attempt to exclude competitors from the category altogether. Inversely, efforts can also be made to change the character of a category by including erstwhile outsiders. This can be done by redefining category boundaries or by questioning someone's eligibility for the status of category member. The redefinition of category boundaries is a hallmark of the Jewish experience in Algeria from the 19th century onward. When France occupied Algeria, its Jewish population was first categorized as indigenous and denied French citizenship; in 1870, the Crémieux Decree recategorized Algeria's Jews as French citizens with the attendant rights (a step that was resisted by many French citizens in Algeria, who did not regard the native Jews as French and resented the dilution of their status); under the Vichy administration, the Crémieux Decree was revoked and Algerian Jews were again defined as "not French"; between 1943 and 1962, French citizenship was restored to Jews (a step that was resisted by General Henri Giraud, the acting Civilian and Military Commander-in-Chief in Algeria); and following independence in 1962,

Algeria's new nationality law denied citizenship to Jews, resulting in the emigration of the overwhelming majority of the country's remaining Jewish population. The realignment of the boundaries of French citizenship as a category in Algeria resulted by turn in the exclusion and inclusion of Jews, while the subsequent formulation of an official category of Algerian citizenship by the newly independent government resulted in the alienation of Jews – who had originally been regarded as native Algerians by France – from any claim to inclusion in the identity of the new state. The twists and turns in the definition of Frenchness and Algerianness were decisive in determining the ability of Algeria's Jews to access extensive social capital, and indeed every change was accompanied by vigorous and often violent arguments for and against, as existing stakeholders struggled to protect their superior status from encroachment and outsiders strove for inclusion.[161] Another tool in the policing of category boundaries entails challenging category membership: claiming that someone is unfit for category membership is a popular and potentially powerful means of marginalizing existing category members. This approach is apparent when people argue that others are not *real* category members; they are somehow "unamerican", as per the approach of the now defunct US House Un-American Activities Committee, or a "foreign plague, not of the flesh of the city of Aššur", as per one

[161] Inglehart and Norris 2016 argues that this same dynamic underpins the rise of populism in the USA and the European Union, as is manifest in the electoral success of Donald J. Trump and Brexit. The development of more inclusive national identities is perceived as a threat to the status of established stakeholders in the USA and EU, who respond by mobilizing around those markers of their collective identity that are threatened by the redefinition of category contours. Another recent study of the changing definition of a social category is Feros 2017, which examines the conceptual development of the "Spanish" as the category transitioned from the *Reconquista* to modernity.

Assyrian ruler's denunciation of a predecessor and (by extension) his descendants.[162] Struggles over category membership can result in the splintering of categories, as well as in the consolidation of previously distinct categories into new, more inclusive supercategories. When such changes occur, they indicate an adjustment in the distribution of power.

This is equally true when the semantic content of a socially determinant category changes. Social categories are not static, but are instead constantly undergoing adjustment and redefinition. Change can be slow and gradual, or occur in leaps and bounds. Semantic shift is the outcome of these changes, and the nature of the shift points to changes in the social foundations that underpin the composition and structure of the category. By the middle of the 19th century, the British aristocracy had enjoyed centuries of privileged access to social and economic capital and was in an unrivalled and little challenged position of power. By the middle of the 20th century, a combination of decolonization, economic change, political democratization, the extension of education to other social classes, and further factors conspired to severely curtail the economic and social capital available to the British aristocracy – or at least that social capital to which they once had exclusive access.[163] This transformation is evident in the semantic transformation of the British aristocracy as a social category, which

[162] See Section 3.4.2: *A Last Hurrah*. The emphasis on the foreignness – the *other*ness – of this predecessor aligns well with the contention of Hoffer 2010: 93 that "the ideal devil is a foreigner. To qualify as a devil, a domestic enemy must be given a foreign ancestry." In this case, that foreign ancestry is highlighted rather than concocted.
[163] See Cannadine 1999 for an extended account of the social transformations that brought about the disintegration of many of the pillars of traditional aristocratic power in Britain.

went from denoting an image of power, wealth, culture, access, and ability, to one that more closely resembled the character of Bertie Wooster, the outdated, incompetent, idle, and socially irrelevant aristocrat of P. G. Wodehouse's comedic imagination. A simple evaluation of the semantic content of the British aristocracy as a social category clearly signals the dramatic change in its status between 1850 and 1950. The same approach can be extended to the study of any socially determinant category.

Indeed, scrutinizing the content and character of socially determinant categories and the collective identities they engender is an underexploited tool of social analysis. These categories are always, at some level, a statement of power relations. They map onto the major cleavages in a social system, identifying the criteria by which power is maintained and contested. [164] If the major socially determinant categories in a social system are based on religious affiliation, major social divisions and their ideological foundations will be articulated in the language of religious disputes, as will most efforts to challenge the status quo. Likewise, a social system in which socially determinant categories express themselves in terms of nations – or classes, or tribes, or whatever else – will articulate its collective identities and struggles for power in the hegemonic discourse of the prevailing categories, or as challenges to this discourse. The rise of new socially determinant categories informed by different premises

[164] As Tilly 1999: 7 points out, "Large, significant inequalities in advantages among human beings correspond mainly to categorical differences such as black/white, male/female, citizen/foreigner, or Muslim/Jew rather than to individual differences in attributes, propensities, or performances."

indicate the changing of the social structure, as do shifts in the content and orientation of established categories. Because there are at any given time multiple socially determinant categories, they are also likely to reflect the fact that power is distributed along several axes at once. Power might be structured around tribes, but it is simultaneously divided along axes of gender, occupation, rank, and so on. The struggle for power never ends; it is only the axes that mark out its distribution that change. Whether inequalities in power are justified with reference to superior breeding, proximity to the divine, or cultural potency, such justifications retain the same social function: to maintain unequal access to capital. The principles of differentiation that underpin such inequalities, however, directly implicate the dominant modes of social organization.[165]

Changes to the prevailing principles of social differentiation have a diagnostic value. The congealing of racial category boundaries in colonial North America was, for instance, symptomatic of a shift in the social order from an emphasis on class to an emphasis on race. Euro-Americans were distinguished more strenuously from their Afro-American counterparts to facilitate a clearer division of the social space, so that social capital (and the lack thereof) attached first to race and only secondarily to class. A divided but multiracial underclass made way for a more profoundly racialized social hierarchy.[166] The restructuring of the social space as a vehicle for altering the allocation of social capital is also evident in the Russian Revolution. In

[165] See Tilly 1999 for a fuller account of the relationship between social categories and structural inequalities.
[166] Horton 1999.

the decades before 1917, an effort was made in the Russian Empire to concentrate social capital in the "Russian people" as a social category[167] (restricted in practice to the established nobility and allied elites and extended only very slowly and very grudgingly to lower social orders); this concentration excluded Russia's many minorities, who were obliged to "Russify" (where possible) if they wanted to access the social capital associated with the state. The Revolution overturned this fundamental social division, ending the "Russian" monopoly on the state's social capital and opening it up to various non-Russians.[168] Instead of maintaining the primarily national divide in the distribution of social capital, the Bolsheviks sought to impose a division according to class.[169] The ensuing civil war was thus fought between partisans of two competing visions of the Russian Empire – one in which social capital inhered in nationality ("Russians"), and one in which it inhered in class (the "working people" of the Empire). V. V. Shulgin, a conservative Russian politician, captured this dynamic succinctly, if bleakly: "We reacted to the 'Yids' just as the Bolsheviks reacted to the *burzhoois*. They shouted 'Death to the *Burzhoois*!' and we replied 'Death to the Yids!'"[170] In the Bolshevik vision, the bourgeoisie were the enemy; in the counterrevolutionary vision, it was the non-Russians – embodied by the quintessentially non-Russian "Yids". The Russian Revolution sought to change the principles of

[167] Наро́дность (nationality) – the third of the three pillars of "official nationality" formulated by Sergey Uvarov in 1833 and subsequently adopted as the semi-official philosophical outlook of Tsarist rule.
[168] It should, therefore, not be entirely surprising that non-Russians are thought to have constituted nearly two-thirds of the leading Bolshevik revolutionaries. See Riga 2008: 649-650.
[169] Note Riga 2008: 686: "The Bolsheviks responded to ancien régime social and political exclusions by mobilizing ethnocultural identities and experiences into a universalist, class-based ideology."
[170] A. J. Mayer 2000: 525, cited from Orlando Figes' history of the Russian Revolution.

social differentiation, but met with vigorous resistance from established stakeholders. The Bolshevik vision, moreover, enjoyed only limited long-term success. The primacy of Russian nationality and the division of the social space by national categories reasserted itself in the early years of the Soviet Union, albeit in the garb of communist internationalism.[171] In eighteenth century North America as in revolutionary Russia, changes in the nature and primacy of particular social categories can be linked directly to a changing distribution of power, a connection that is historically and socially generalizable.

Struggles between categories look different from the inside and the outside. Because all categories are composite in character, power is contested both within and between them – and the distinction is not always clear. While Germans can compete with Frenchmen, Catholic Germans can also compete with Protestant Germans. From a different social perspective, however, this construction can be inverted. While Catholics can compete with Protestants, German Catholics can also compete with French Catholics. Competing forms of categorical division exist within social systems, offering different visions of how the social space ought to be structured and power distributed within it. At different historical moments, different visions will prevail, indicating the realignment of the social space. In the same way that social categories are endlessly prone to qualification and consolidation, so too socially determinant

[171] The Soviet institutionalization of national categories is noted by Brubaker and Cooper 2000: 25-26. A thorough account of Soviet nationality policies can be found in Slezkine 1994, which is also cited by Brubaker and Cooper 2000.

categories conceal significant subcategorical diversity and occlude their propensity to merge with others under certain circumstances. Protestants and Catholics can be united as Germans, and Germans can be divided as Catholics and Protestants. In either case, the fracturing or coalescence of categories is a marker of social change. The nature of competition over power is in this sense a function of perspective, with categories consolidating and dividing in different configurations to form still other categories that in turn compete with analogously composite categories. This dynamic is theoretically scalable from the smallest social units to the very largest (humankind). The result is a social system in which different social categories are constantly shuffling around, sometimes expanding, sometimes contracting; sometimes fracturing, sometimes merging; sometimes emerging, sometimes withering away into nothingness. In any given time and place, the existing socially determinant categories are signposts of the social structure, and the form and content of these categories are markers of how power is distributed and the terms by which it is contested.[172]

2.5 The Social Categories Approach

> *We know who is who! Now there isn't a doubt.*
>
> *The best kind of Sneetches are Sneetches without!*

[172] As per Bourdieu 1991: 167: "The different classes and class fractions are engaged in a symbolic struggle properly speaking, one aimed at imposing the definition of the social world that is best suited to their interests. The field of ideological stances thus reproduces in transfigured form the field of social positions."

- Dr. Seuss, The Sneetches[173]

Human cognitive processes govern how humans relate to the worlds they inhabit. Categorization is fundamental to these processes, and the resulting categories are central to how we construct reality. They serve essential heuristic purposes, and we are not equipped to navigate reality without them. Categories pervade human thinking in all spheres. Since human life is so deeply embedded in social relations, categories also serve to describe and create orders of difference in the social world. We cannot but think of our fellow humans in categorical terms – these are friends, and those are enemies; this lot are Anglophone, and that lot speak other tongues; these people consume animals, and those ones are vegans. Despite their inherent ambiguities and multiplicity, social categories give shape to the social landscape. This enables us to see difference and, when categories are ensconced in the broader social world that produces them, to determine how others relate to us in complex social situations. Social categories do more than merely describe: they prejudice social expectations and affect behavior. In this capacity, they not only shape our conception of the social landscape, but actively work to perpetuate themselves in each and every interaction over which they exert influence.

Not all social categories are equal. Some are incidental and ephemeral, describing a momentary principle of social differentiation that applies only in conditions of minimal

[173] Seuss 1961: 18.

temporal and spatial reach. Other categories, however, exert profound influence on the construction of the social space and the determination of social relations. The centrality of these social categories is such that it can elicit individual acts of identification, creating the necessary preconditions for the formation and perpetuation of collective identities. When social categories generate and sustain a critical mass of individual subscribers, they can produce social cohesion and catalyze collective action, the characteristics that allow them to be classified as collective identities. The sorts of categories that can take this developmental leap are those that structure society or aspire to do so – what I call socially determinant categories.

Because of the importance of socially determinant categories in the construction of the social space, membership in these categories has extensive implications. The social space is delimited in very different ways for members of distinct categories. These variant delimitations of social space produce divergent outcomes for individuals, who experience the social world differently and have differentiated access to the social capital that inheres in their category memberships. Socially determinant categories establish social boundaries, creating imbalances between people who fall on either side of the boundary. Moving or crossing these boundaries can dramatically alter the social fortunes of groups and individuals. Contests over the meaning and primacy of social categories are thus simultaneously proxies for contests over the distribution of power. Social categories structure the social space, mark out its salient boundaries, and are the site of inequalities in and contests over power. An analysis of the

prevailing system of socially determinant categories is, accordingly, a key to understanding social systems writ large.

The social categories approach offers numerous advantages relative to other analytical models. It unites all expressions of collective identity in a single conceptual framework, accounting for their origins and their social role; it affords sufficient flexibility to include the many manifestations of social categories in the same interpretative scheme without forcing them into any typological straightjackets; and it recognizes the multiplicity and flexibility of social categories, enabling a fuller appreciation of their multidimensionality and composite character. Above all, the social categories approach facilitates comparative work between all categories and integrates them into the construction of the social world. This enables social categories to afford direct insight into the broader functioning of social systems. Social categories become indicators of existing social fractures and identify salient social inequalities. Documenting the evolution of social categories over time, moreover, allows scholars to examine the dynamics of social change in the *longue durée*.

After theory comes practice: how can the social categories approach be applied to evidence? Extending the present model to the evidentiary record requires that a social category be identified and deconstructed. What is the content of the category? Who does it include, and on what terms? How do category members relate to those of other categories? Are the category's boundaries being challenged, tested, or contested, and if so, how and by whom? To

answer such questions it is necessary to consider emic and etic perspectives, and to be sensitive to how these can vary internally. The answers, however, will determine the nature of the social category, whether it functions as a collective identity, and what this can in turn tell us about its place in the social system. With this information, we can begin to map out the social space, locating its organizational nodes, its sites of conflict, and its imbalances. To understand society, we should start from the ground up, free from anachronistic assumptions and classificatory strictures; this is the universalizing promise of the social categories approach.

3. They Swore by the Life of the City: The Old Assyrian Period (*c*. 2000-1500 BCE)

šībūtum išmū siqiršu

Namtara ina āli ibnū bīssu

iqbūma issû nāgirū

rigma ušebbū ina mātim

The elders heard his speech,

They built a temple for Namtara in the city.

They commanded and the heralds announced,

They filled the land with bustle.

- *Atra-ḫasīs* 400-404[174]

וַיִּמְאֲנוּ הָעָם לִשְׁמֹעַ בְּקוֹל שְׁמוּאֵל וַיֹּאמְרוּ לֹא כִּי אִם-מֶלֶךְ יִהְיֶה עָלֵינוּ וְהָיִינוּ גַּם-אֲנַחְנוּ כְּכָל-הַגּוֹיִם וּשְׁפָטָנוּ

מַלְכֵּנוּ וְיָצָא לְפָנֵינוּ וְנִלְחַם אֶת-מִלְחֲמֹתֵנוּ

[174] *Atra-ḫasīs* 400-404 in Lambert and Millard 1999: 68-69.

> But the people refused to heed the voice of Samuel, and they said: "No! For there will be a king over us, and we too will be like all the peoples, and our king will rule us and lead us and fight our wars."
>
> - *1 Samuel 8: 19-20*

3.1 Beginnings

Like its Akkadian cognate *Aššurāyū*, the term "Assyrians" is derived from the proper noun Aššur. Semantically, the term denotes those who have some connection to Aššur. But what is Aššur? We first encounter Aššur as the name of a settlement in northern Mesopotamia that dates at least to the beginning of the third millennium BCE (its ruins are now known by the name al-Qal'ah ash-Sharqiya, or Qal'at Sherqat). The town was perched on a rocky promontory high above the Tigris river,[175] sitting at a geographical point of transition. To Aššur's north is a highland landscape that can sustain dry farming and gives way gradually to mountains; to Aššur's south is a small elevated ridge, the Jabāl Hamrin, before the landscape opens up to the great, flat alluvial plain of lower Mesopotamia, where the Tigris and Euphrates sustain an agricultural regime that depends on irrigation; to Aššur's east are the mountain paths that link Mesopotamia to the Iranian Plateau and its mineral resources; and to Aššur's west is the Jazira,

[175] This was, at least, the case in the historical period under consideration here. The course of the Tigris has since shifted, so that the height upon which Aššur sits no longer juts into the river in the shape of an arrowhead.

a largely arid steppe that extends into modern Syria and toward the Euphrates and Habur rivers. Aššur's position as a transitional node between distinct geographical zones ensured that it was neither central to any of the zones it bordered nor insulated from the social and economic influences that these zones exerted. How did this place become the etymological root of a social category?

Little is known about Aššur in the third millennium. Aside from a handful of passing references in a variety of sources, there is no contemporaneous written evidence attesting to the origin or earliest history of the city.[176] The dearth of evidence has resulted in a glut of speculation. Much of this speculation interprets the limited early material in the light of later evidence, projecting into Aššur's distant past vistas of its later future.[177] In the second millennium, the term Aššur is known to have had a second semantic dimension, namely its use to designate an eponymous god. It has accordingly been suggested that Aššur's origins should be located in the site's inherent sanctity – a product of Aššur's imposing natural geography.[178] In this view, the promontory upon which Aššur is built is itself divine, a deified natural feature

[176] For a concise survey of third millennium textual attestations of Aššur and individuals probably connected to Aššur, see Barjamovic 2011: 4-5, fn. 15.

[177] This is particularly true of earlier scholarship that envisions the existence around 2000 BCE of an Assyrian empire on the model of the well-known Assyrian empire of the first millennium. See for instance J. Lewy 1956: 53 ff and H. Lewy 1964.

[178] Lambert 1983: 85: "The site of the town Aššur is a natural hill... Merely as a natural feature it stands above the nearby hills on its west side, and from the river side it is quite impressive. We suggest that it was a holy spot in prehistoric times." See also Maul 2017: 339-340. Radner 2015: 11 takes for granted the identity between the god Aššur and the elevated promontory upon which the city Aššur sits: "The god Aššur and the city of Aššur are inseparable, as the deity is the personification of the rocky crag called Qal'at Sherqat in Arabic that towers high above a bend of the river Tigris."

of the kind that is attested elsewhere in the upper Mesopotamian cultural tradition.[179] Iconographic and onomastic evidence has been used to support the identification of the god Aššur with the deified promontory.[180] It is also possible to point to one of the oldest surviving inscriptions from Aššur, which preserves a writing of the term Aššur with the determinative signs for both deities and geographical places, rendering "the place/city of the divine Aššur" or "the divine place/city Aššur".[181] The simultaneous use of both determinatives is not attested in subsequent royal inscriptions, however, so that the extent to which it should be understood as indicative of a fusion of god and place is debatable. Still others have proposed that Aššur served as a focal point for the religious devotion of pastoral people in the region, who would assemble there to conduct seasonal rites of worship and exchange.[182] Such thinking is informed in no small measure by the Assyrian King List's account of a time when Assyria's kings are said to have lived in tents.[183]

[179] Lambert 1983: 84 offers parallels for this phenomenon.
[180] See Lassen 2017: 187. See Kryszat 1995 for the additional identification of Aššur as the god of the springs associated with the site.
[181] This is the inscription of Zarriqum (Grayson 1987: A. 0.1003.2001), the Ur III period governor of Aššur.
[182] See for instance Poebel 1942: 252 ff., with echoes in Larsen 2000: 77. This argument is a conceptual parallel for the now standard interpretation of the function of the Neolithic site of Göbekli Tepe as a center for collective feasting, for which see Dietrich, Notroff, and Schmidt 2017.
[183] This account is almost certainly ahistorical, and has more to do with the Upper Mesopotamian king Šamšī-Adad I than with the early history of Aššur, for which see Finkelstein 1996 and Valk Forthcoming; the Assyrian King List is discussed at greater length in section 4.2.1: *The King*. The idea of Assyrian origins among pastoralists suggested by the Assyrian King List is reflected in Weiss 2017, who proposes that climactic conditions were responsible for a period of nomadization toward the end of the third millennium, precisely when the Assyrian "kings in tents" are supposed to have reigned. To the extent that Weiss' reconstruction is accurate, however, these kings in tents are nevertheless extrinsic to the Assyrian tradition.

Identifying the site of Aššur as intrinsically holy helps to make sense of the anomalousness of the eponymous god. Although it is common for ancient Mesopotamian gods to be associated with particular cities, Aššur is the only one who is known to have had the same name as his city.[184] Aššur lacks the family relationships that are shared by other Mesopotamian gods, and we know of no original mythology that involves Aššur or of any individualized characteristics or traits attributed to him.[185] Aššur is a god without a discernible persona or divine context. Equating the god Aššur with the site Aššur accounts for the oddity of the deity while retaining the semantic duality of the term Aššur as a marker for both god and place. Aššur is odd because unlike the other major Mesopotamian deities, he is a landscape god – or so the argument goes.

The premise that the site of Aššur had some religious importance is supported by the archaeological record. Already toward the middle of the third millennium there is evidence of a monumental temple in the settlement. Ironically, this temple is not focused on the figure of Aššur, but is instead the temple of the goddess Ištar.[186] A devotional emphasis on Ištar is consistent with regional patterns, as Ištar also enjoyed devotional priority in two nearby urban centers, Nineveh and Arbela, both of which had their own localized Ištars. In the first half of the

[184] Though there are parallels further afield, like the relationship between the city Athens and the goddess Athena.
[185] On the anomalousness of the god Aššur, see Maul 2017: 339 and Lambert 1983: 82-83.
[186] See Bär 2003a for an overview of the archaeology of the old Ištar temple in Aššur, and Meinhold 2009: 15-29 for an overview of its history through to the end of the Old Assyrian period. Bär 2003b dates even the "archaic" Ištar temple to the Late Early Dynastic or Akkadian period.

second millennium BCE, texts demonstrate the existence of an analogous localized Ištar in Aššur: Ištar-Aššurītu, the Assyrian Ištar.[187] Worship of Ištar is, moreover, attested throughout Mesopotamia at this time.[188] In Aššur itself, the oldest texts were all recovered from the remains of the Ištar temple, including a brief inscription recording the dedication of spoils of war to this goddess.[189] The other inscriptions recovered there are also dedications to deities, albeit not explicitly to Ištar. Strikingly, there are no third millennium inscriptions recording the dedication of gifts to Aššur, or any recognizable references to Aššur as a distinct god. Given the paucity of our evidence, it is impossible to rule out that the god Aššur enjoyed recognition as a deity in his own right in third millennium Aššur, or that he was revered there. The oldest iteration of the Aššur temple in Aššur, however, appears to date only to the beginning of the second millennium.[190] By contrast, the prominence of Ištar in local religious practice is of greater antiquity and more in keeping with regional norms.

[187] See Bär 2003a: 51-54 on the goddess Ištar-Aššurītu in the Old Assyrian period. See also Kryszat 2017 for a votive inscription dedicated to Ištar Aššurītu written on behalf of an Old Assyrian *gubabtu* priestess.
[188] This is true from Uruk in the south (where Ištar features as the Sumerian Inana) to Syria in the West. For Ištar's role as patron goddess of the city of Agade and the kings of Agade, see Foster 2016: 60 and 141 respectively. For the possible political use of Ištar in upper Mesopotamia to create community across distance in the first half of the second millennium, see Knott 2017.
[189] Grayson 1987: A.0.1001.1: *Ititi waklum mār Ininlaba ina šallati Gasur ana Ištar išriq* (Ititi the ruler, son of Ininlaba, dedicated [specific object(s)] from the spoils of Gasur to the goddess Ištar). It should be noted that some of the oldest texts recovered from the Ištar temple might originally have been deposited elsewhere, and it is possible that the Ištar temple is a secondary context for them in every respect.
[190] See Haller and Andrae 1955: 6-37 for an overview of the archaeological history of the Aššur temple; pages 9-14 survey the Aššur temple in its earliest stages. See also van Driel 1969: 4-15. Based on the chronological gap between the Ištar and Aššur temples, Maul 2017: 338 argues that "we do not know if, in that early time, the rulers of the city also sought to obtain the grace of the god Assur; indeed, we cannot even say if the cult of Assur was already propagated in the third millennium BCE."

Whatever the status of the god Aššur, the city Aššur underwent significant exposure to the experiments in pan-Mesopotamian empire of the second half of the third millennium. Both the Akkadian and the Ur III empires have left traces of their presence in Aššur. One of the old dedicatory inscriptions from the Ištar temple in Aššur is written on behalf of Azuzu, who identifies himself as the servant of Manishtushu, one of the kings of Agade.[191] Another old inscription from the Ištar temple in Aššur is written on behalf of Zarriqum, who identifies himself as the governor (GIR_3.$NITA_2$: *šakkanakkum*) of Aššur and the servant of Amar-Sîn, one of the Ur III kings.[192] While the extent and nature of Aššur's integration into these proto-imperial frameworks is unclear, the city was unquestionably subject to their influence. Conceivably, the elimination of barriers to trade under imperial conditions combined with Aššur's favorable location to facilitate and intensify the city's involvement in interregional exchange, which so characterizes Aššur's subsequent history.[193] Be that as it may, all that we can conclude with any certainty about third millennium Aššur is that it sat on the intersection between different geographical zones, possessed at least one monumental temple, was

[191] Grayson 1987: A.0.1002.2001: *Man-ištūšu šar Kiš Azuzu warassu ana Be'al*-SI.SI *išriq* (Manishtushu, king of Kish, his servant Azuzu dedicated [this inscribed spear] to the deity Be'al-SI.SI). See Foster 2016: 63 for an overview of the evidence of the Akkadian occupation of and influence in Aššur.

[192] Grayson 1987: A. 0.1003.2001: *bīt Bēlet-ekallim bēlatīšu ana balāṭ Amar-Sîn* (x x) *šar Ur u šar kibrātim arba'im Zarriqum šakkanak* ^{d}*Aššur*^{ki} *warassu ana balāṭīšu īpuš* (For the life of Amar-Sîn, (?), king of Ur and king of the four quarters, (and) for his own life, Zarriqum, the *šakkanakkum* of Aššur, has built the temple of the goddess Bēlet-ekallim, his lady). See Hallo 1956 and Michalowski 2009 for discussions of the person of Zarriqum and of Aššur's status within the Ur III realm; Hallo regards Zarriqum as an external appointee of the Ur III kings, while Michalowski views him as an independent local vassal of the Ur III kings.

[193] As suggested by Foster 2016: 63-64. See also Veenhof 2017b: 62 for the view that Aššur's role as trade center likely extends deep into the third millennium, long before our sources provide meaningful data.

integrated into broader regional networks of contact and exchange,[194] and was exposed to the imperial projects of southern Mesopotamia – but that's it, really. There is nothing substantial here on which to peg the existence of Assyrians as a social category, let alone to explore the category's composition.

3.2 The Old Assyrian Social World

Our ability to assess the character of Assyrians as a social category depends entirely on the available sources. From this point of view, Assyrians erupt onto the historical stage in a sudden, torrential outburst. Extensive documentation exists of the lives of Assyrians in the first three centuries of the second millennium BCE – roughly speaking, the time designated here as the Old Assyrian period.[195] A great majority of the evidence we have comes from the site of Kanesh (modern Kültepe) in central Anatolia. By 2008, excavations in Kültepe recovered roughly 23,000 texts, and many others might still be found.[196] This textual cornucopia dates from a period spanning two and a half centuries between about 1972 and 1718 BCE, with the bulk of the dated texts hailing from a seventy year window between 1900 and 1830.[197] With some exceptions, the texts are written by, to, and for Assyrians – the *mer'ū Aššur*, or children of

[194] This is self-evident: Aššur was no island, and its geography facilitated contact with outsiders. More immediately, such contacts are apparent in the use of the cuneiform script, worship of familiar Mesopotamian deities like Ištar, and a material culture that is indistinct from that of contemporaneous sites in the area.
[195] On the question of periodization, see Veenhof 2008c: 19-27.
[196] Veenhof 2008c: 41.
[197] See Figure 14 in Barjamovic, Hertel, and Larsen 2012: 56. See also Appendix 1 in Barjamovic, Hertel, and Larsen 2012 for a proposed alignment of the relative chronology of the Old Assyrian texts with absolute chronology.

Aššur.[198] They are comprised primarily of the correspondence and legal documents of Assyrians in Kanesh, a journey of some 1,100 kilometers (or about six weeks by donkey caravan) from the city of Aššur.[199] In these texts, we find Assyrians in the city of Aššur, certainly, but especially in an extensive network of mercantile communities spread out across eastern and central Anatolia and centered on the city of Kanesh.[200] Assyrians in Anatolia conducted a complex trade in various goods, tying Anatolia to northern Mesopotamia and associated regions. Who were the children of Aššur, and what was the character of this social category? To answer these questions, we must examine the social worlds in which Assyrians operated.

3.2.1 Aššur – The City

The social world of the children of Aššur was based first and foremost in the city of Aššur. This is evident not only in its centrality to their collective designation, which places them in a direct, genealogical relationship with Aššur, but also in the prominence of Aššur in the texts. Despite the physical distance between the two sites, references to the city of Aššur are ubiquitous in the documentation from Kanesh. In Old Assyrian texts Aššur is usually referred to

[198] Although the term rendered here as "children" is technically masculine, it can also include females when it is applied to a group that includes both males and females. The masculine form of the formula "child of Aššur" (son of Aššur) is the default in our sources, but its feminine equivalent *mer'at Aššur* (daughter of Aššur) is also attested, for instance in the text Kt 94/k 149: 13-14 in Michel and Garelli 1996b. On the Old Assyrian forms of the words for son (*mer'um*) and daughter (*mer'atum*), see Kouwenberg 2017: 5.6.3 and 5.6.4 (pp. 190-193) respectively.
[199] See Larsen 2015: 175-176 for an account of the route that travelers between Aššur and Kanesh would have traversed in the Old Assyrian period.
[200] See Barjamovic 2011 for a study of the geography of the Assyrian presence in Anatolia.

simply as the *ālum*, "the city".[201] Occasionally, this is disambiguated by adding the word Aššur to create the phrase *ālum Aššur*, "the city Aššur", but the noun Aššur never stands alone as a designation for the site.[202] In the worldview of the Old Assyrian texts, there is only ever one city that can possibly be construed as *the city*, and it is Aššur. For the children of Aššur, this place was their ancestral home, the focal point of their political and religious life, their legal court of final appeal, and the fulcrum of their mercantile activities. The city's symbolic value is apparent in one salient example: where most contemporary Mesopotamians would conclude binding agreements by swearing on a selection of gods and potentates, Assyrians swore instead on the life of their city (*nīš ālim tamā'um*).[203]

In the beginning of the Old Assyrian period, Aššur had a distinctive political organization that was rooted in a collective mode of governance.[204] At the heart of Aššur's government was a city assembly, known, like the city itself, as the *ālum*.[205] This metonymic relationship is

[201] On the city (*ālum*) in the Old Babylonian period, see Seri 2005: Chapter 5
[202] As also noted by Larsen 2000: 79.
[203] See Hertel 2013: 209-210. For two specific examples, see Kienast 1960: 24: 15: *nīš ālim itmūma*, or Larsen 1988: 84a: 95-96: *ša nīš ālim ka''ilā*.
[204] See Fleming 2004 for a study of collective governance in the contemporaneous evidence from Mari. Pongratz-Leisten 2015: 61-62 situates the distinctive collective bent of Old Assyrian political life in a broader cultural context, pointing to evidence of collective government in the Mari texts and the later texts from Emar, as well as to the evidence concerning the Hurrian city of Urkesh, which is collected in Buccellati 2013. See also A. Westenholz 2004 for an argument against Aššur's institutional distinctiveness.
[205] Already in the 1940s Thorkild Jacobsen identified Old Assyrian governance "as a particularly striking example" of what he terms "primitive democracy", for which see Jacobsen 1943: 161-162. For a study of ancient Mesopotamian urban collective governance generally, see van de Mieroop 1999b, Fleming 2004: Chapter 4, Seri 2005: Chapter 6 and the more temporally constrained discussion of Barjamovic 2004. For overviews of the Old Assyrian city assembly in Aššur, its components, and its powers, see Larsen 1976: 160-191, Hertel 2013: 43-45 (see also figure 11 on page 51), and Larsen 2015: chapter 9. For collective governance in Mesopotamian mythology, see Bartash 2010.

suggestive of the importance of the assembly to the functioning of the city, to the point where the two could be thought of as identical. We cannot determine precisely who participated in this assembly or how it operated. At a bare minimum, the assembly included a group of elders – the *šībūtum*.[206] This group does not necessarily comprise those who reached an advanced age, but rather those who enjoyed a senior social status.[207] This status is likely related to seniority in and legal power over one of the various patrilineal kinship units or households (*bēt abim* – house of the father) out of which Assyrian society was knitted together.[208] It is likely that the assembly included more junior Assyrians as well. A comparison with Assyrian self-governance in Anatolia suggests that there was broad representative government in Aššur. In this model, a small council consisting of the elders and possibly of other leading men exercised authority in most affairs while a more inclusive plenary assembly could be convened in certain contexts.

[206] The *ālum* and the *šībūtum* appear to be largely congruous in Contenau 1920: 1, as noted by Larsen 1976: 163. Note also the discussion of the elders in Larsen 1976: 163-166.

[207] Larsen 1976: 370: "It is obvious however that the city-assembly represented the main kinship groups in the society, and the 'elders' were most probably the heads of the most influential kinship units." For context, see Fleming 2004: 190-195 for an overview of the constitution and function of "elders" in the contemporaneous evidence from the Mari texts. See also Klengel 1960 and Seri 2005: Chapter 4 for studies of "elders" in the Old Babylonian period and von Dassow 2012: 182-183 on the membership of Mesopotamian city assemblies in general.

[208] For the *bēt abim*, see Hertel 2015. Hertel 2013: 43 also raises the possibility of overlap or alignment between the *šībūtum* and the heads of the paternal estates. See further Schloen 2001: chapter 12 for an analysis of patrimonial society in the ancient Near East; the *bēt abim* would fall into the mode of social organization discussed by Schloen. As a helpful counterpoint to Schloen's approach, see Fleming 2002.

This division is attested in a single text that speaks of a body called the *ālum ṣaḫer rabi* (the city, small and great),[209] indicating the convocation at least once of such a plenary assembly.[210]

Whatever its composition, the *ālum* acts in various legislative and executive capacities, enjoying broad authority in Aššur and over Assyrians outside of the city. In our texts, the *ālum* can be seen issuing verdicts (*dīn ālim*), instructions (*awāt ālim*), and decrees (*ṭēm ālim*) on a range of issues. There is a clear expectation that these verdicts and decrees will be observed and implemented – an assumption that appears entirely justified in the Kanesh texts, where the *ālum*'s decisions are frequently cited and treated as authoritative.[211] Verdicts concern various legal and mercantile affairs, including the settlement of debts and claims arising from the complex financial and commercial exchanges undertaken by Assyrian merchants, or the settlement of disputes concerning inheritance or divorce.[212] Instructions and decrees concern a wider array of problems, as is exemplified by one ruling on the extent to which Assyrians were empowered to make their own decisions about where to trade: *ana mala ṭēm ālim aššur mer aššur šumšu ašar balāṭīšu illak* (in accordance with the decree of the City of Aššur, any son of Aššur is to go wherever it is profitable for him).[213] This passage implies that the *ālum* had the

[209] The phrase *ṣaḫer rabi* should be understood as a merism for the community as a whole.
[210] The *ālum ṣaḫer rabi* is attested in text 64 in Donbaz 1989. The lack of further evidence of such a plenary assembly in Aššur has led Hertel 2013: 46, fn. 222 and Larsen 2015: 114 to question the value of this single source as evidence of the plenary assembly's existence. See also Dercksen 2004: 237-238.
[211] For an illustrative set of texts documenting the *ālum*'s issuance of a verdict and the verdict's subsequent afterlife, see Kt 94/k 1136, Kt 94/k 839, and Kt 94/k 841 – texts 74, 75, and 76 in Larsen 2010.
[212] See Hertel 2013: 88-92 for an overview of the *ālum*'s verdicts.
[213] Kt 94/k 763: 10-12 in Larsen 2013: text 494. See Hertel 2013: 73-77 for an overview of the *ālum*'s orders and decrees.

nominal authority to delimit the freedom of movement for commercial purposes of Assyrians everywhere. The text's discovery in Kanesh also demonstrates that the *ālum*'s decision was circulated among Assyrians in Anatolia, and that it was regarded as the decision of a higher jurisdiction. Other texts reinforce the view that the *ālum* governed trade policy for Assyrians as a category.[214] This is reflected in the *ālum*'s role in concluding treaties with other polities, which were largely concerned with regulating trade.[215] The parties to one surviving treaty involving Aššur are the king of Apum, a city in northern Mesopotamia on one of the caravan routes from Aššur to Anatolia, and the city of Aššur itself (*ālum Aššur*). Among the five substantially preserved treaties recovered from Apum, only the one with Aššur involves the corporate *ālum* as a treaty partner.[216] In all others, the parties to the treaty are individual potentates acting on behalf of various cities, territories, peoples, or other assembled constituents. In Aššur, by contrast, it is the *ālum* as a collective body rather than any single individual that is empowered to act in external affairs.

Making decisions and determining policy are not the same as ensuring their implementation. The *ālum*'s resolutions were not idle. One letter between Assyrians concerning the settlement of accounts with the *ālum* includes the memorable admonition that *awāt ālim*

[214] Veenhof 1995: 1732-1733.
[215] For an overview of these treaties, see Veenhof 2008c: 183-218.
[216] For an edition of the treaty with commentary, see Eidem 1991; for further commentary and the rest of the corpus of treaty texts recovered from Tell Leilan, see Eidem 2011: Part II.

dannat (the instruction of the *ālum* is stringent).[217] To enforce its decisions, the *ālum* commissioned official envoys (*šiprū ša ālim*), who communicated its will and represented its interests across geographical space.[218] Such envoys are attested in numerous texts from Kanesh. In one text, Aššur's envoys participate in reviewing a local dispute and one of them is entrusted with bringing back important legal documents to Aššur;[219] in another text, Aššur's envoys serve as witnesses to a legal agreement.[220] The *ālum* approved the appointment of broadly empowered investigative attorneys (*rābiṣum*) to adjudicate complex disputes according to its laws.[221] This prerogative is evident in one letter that records the *ālum*'s official grant of permission for the hiring of such an attorney.[222] The *ālum* imposed fines on those who violated its statutes, a power that is manifest in a letter that cautions an Assyrian in Anatolia that if he does not come to the city as directed, it will levy a penalty of 4 talents of tin and 100 *kutānum* textiles from his account;[223] in another letter, an Assyrian merchant mentions that the *ālum* imposed a fine of one mina of silver on him.[224] The *ālum* acted as the highest court for the arbitration of legal quarrels. In a characteristic example, local arbitration between two feuding Assyrians in Anatolia fails. Accordingly, both parties consent to journey to Aššur to submit

[217] RC 1749 B: 25-26, text 3 in Larsen 2002: 6-7.
[218] For an overview of evidence of and debate on these messengers, see Hertel 2013: 63-73.
[219] Kt 94/k 842 in Larsen 2010: text 109: 63-66.
[220] Kt o/k 88 in Albayrak 2006: text 19: 20.
[221] On the Old Assyrian *rābiṣum*, see Hertel 2013: 92-98.
[222] Kt 94/k 1300 in Larsen 2010: text 116: 5-11.
[223] This warning appears in Kt 94/k 839 and Kt 94/k 841, Larsen 2010: texts 75 and 76 respectively.
[224] Kt 94/k 1403 in Larsen 2014: 690: 13-16.

themselves to the judgement of the *ālum*. One party declares *anāku u atta ana ālim lunuṣīma ālum u bēlnī luzakkiniāti* (Let you and me go out to the *ālum* and let the *ālum* and our lord settle our affair); the other party assents, declaring *ālum u rubā'um luzakkiniāti* (let the *ālum* and the ruler settle our affair).[225] The *ālum* serves as the court of final appeal, but this passage also introduces another fixture in the government of Aššur: the ruler.

In addition to the *ālum*, Aššur had a chief executive officer – the "lord/ruler" alluded to in the letter cited above. This office appears to have been occupied primarily by fathers and sons in hereditary succession. The post is attested by several names. Beginning with Ṣilulu (*c*. 2000 BCE), the earliest attested occupant of the office, the inscriptions of these executives (anachronistically known as royal inscriptions in modern scholarly literature) identify them by a classic formula that persists over nearly a millennium and a half of Assyrian kingship. Ṣilulu is the first in a very long line of Assyrian potentates to style himself *iššak Aššur*, "the viceroy of Aššur".[226] Although this is the preferred title of Old Assyrian rulers in their own inscriptions, it is not attested in other text genres. Outside of their inscriptions, Assyrian rulers are known by the titles *bēlum* (lord) and *rubā'um* (ruler), as well as by the title *waklum* (overseer), which is the

[225] Larsen 1988: text 84a: 69-70 and 101-102. In kt 94/k 842, an Assyrian likewise looks to the *ālum* for justice when no satisfactory resolution is to be had in Anatolia. The Assyrian wants to make sure that his written claims are delivered to Aššur by the city's envoy; if it turns out the envoy did not have the relevant documents when he set out to Aššur, the Assyrian pledges to set out in person to the city: *šumma ṭuppī kārum ana Buziya ula ittadnū tîrtaknu lillikamma latbiamma latalkamma ālī u bēlī līšuranni* (if the *kārum* has not given my tablets to Buziya [the *šiprum ša ālim* – envoy of the city], send me word, so that I can set out and come; let my city and my lord give me justice). For this passage, see Larsen 2010: 109: 66-68.

[226] Grayson 1987: A.0.27.1: 3-4. The combination of the title *iššakkum* with a place name is also attested in the contemporaneous inscriptions of the rulers of Ešnunna, for which see Frayne 1990: E4.5.

title they used in their own correspondence.[227] For all of the grandiloquence of this titulature, it should be noted that at no point and in no genre do any of the Old Assyrian rulers style themselves king (*šarrum*). This is true despite the fact that the royal title was adopted by many contemporary rulers of nearby places of no great significance. The only exception to this rule highlights the anomaly: in what is presumably a copy of one of the inscriptions of Erišum I, he is recorded as stating that if the temple he built should become dilapidated, *šarrum šumšu ša kīma yāti* (any *king* who is like myself) who decides to restore it should take care not to disturb his foundation deposit.[228] A fragmentary but direct parallel to this passage is preserved in an actual inscription from the Aššur temple in Aššur, in which Erišum uses the same set phrase but substitutes the known Old Assyrian title *rubā'um* in place of the word 'king': *rubā'um šumšu ša kīma yāti* (any *ruler* who is like myself).[229] Given that the text that refers to Erišum as king is a copy rather than an actual inscription recovered *in situ*, it is possible that the term 'king' is a conscious or unconscious scribal emendation that was never inscribed in an official context. Even if the copied text had been inscribed in Aššur with the royal title, the preponderance of the evidence – including the internal evidence of the text itself, in which Erišum lists his title as the conventional *iššak* Aššur – would suggest that Erišum was not claiming the title of king so

[227] For which see Michel 2015b and Erol 2018. *Waklum* is also the title attested in the Kültepe Eponym List in combination with *bēlum* in the formula *ištu rēš kussîm ša* RN *waklim bēlīni* (from the accession of RN the overseer, our lord); see Veenhof 2003a: Chapter 2 for an edition of the relevant text.
[228] Grayson 1987: A.0.33.1: 20. This inscription is recorded alongside another inscription in a single tablet from Kanesh. Why the text was inscribed on a tablet in Kanesh is unclear.
[229] Grayson 1987: A.0.33.10: iii 4-5.

much as using the title as a generic descriptor of his status. The formula "any *king* who is like myself" is at best a claim of parity with kings on the basis of comparative status rather than on the basis of titulature. Erišum's station is presented as the equivalent of that of the kings of other polities, but he is not himself king.

There is no reason why Aššur's scale or stature might prevent an Assyrian ruler from calling himself king. Why, then, did they not adopt the title? Old Assyrian rulers did not call themselves kings because they lacked the powers of kingship.[230] As we have seen, it was the *ālum* that enjoyed many of the powers associated with kingship, from concluding treaties and issuing decrees to passing judgement and regulating trade. In the context of the *ālum*'s extensive powers, the ruler was merely its semi-autonomous functionary. In the surviving correspondence of Old Assyrian rulers (the *waklum* letters), they refer to themselves by the title *waklum*.[231] Of the seventeen letters written by Old Assyrian rulers to the Assyrian community in Kanesh, fully twelve involve the ruler conveying the decrees of the *ālum*.[232] The

[230] The parallel use of the title *iššakkum* by the rulers of Ešnunna (for which see Frayne 1990: E4.5) is instructive in this regard. In Ešnunna, the title *iššak* Ešnunna was eventually jettisoned in favor of the title of king. This suggests that the use of the title *iššakkum* in Aššur was not merely an artifact of ideology, but a reflection of the political situation of the ruler and of his aspirations. Those Assyrian rulers who could credibly claim the title of king did, as is apparent under Šamšī-Adad I and under Aššur-uballiṭ I and his successors

[231] It is a testament to the forward march of Assyriological knowledge that Michel 2015b: 45 states that there are 25 such letters, and Larsen 2015: 108 says he knows of "no fewer than twenty-seven letters, published and unpublished, written by the king as *waklum*." By contrast, Erol 2018: 48 refers to "a total of thirty-six known letters sent by the rulers of Assur." Erol 2018: 49 provides a useful catalogue of these letters. It is worth noting that while the title *rubā'um* is also used in Old Assyrian texts to designate Anatolian potentates, the Assyrian ruler refrains from using it in his own correspondence with fellow Assyrians, steering clear of any pretention to such an exalted status.

[232] Michel 2015b: 46 and Larsen 2015: 108-109. The formula is *ālum dīnam iddin-ma* (the *ālum* issued a decree and [it is as follows]).

ruler appears to act as an executive agent of the *ālum* rather than as a figure of significant independent authority. Indeed, the *waklum* letters reveal that the Assyrian ruler was a full participant in Assyrian mercantile activities in Anatolia, investing in the trade in a personal capacity and becoming entangled in the complex system of credit that underpinned it.[233] Most importantly, the ruler participated in the trade on the same terms as Assyrian merchants, communicating with his correspondents in matters of business as one would with business partners of equal rank.[234] There is no indication here of a powerful, authoritarian figure with the ability to impose his will or command others to do his bidding – at least not independently of the *ālum*. In material terms the ruler also appears to play second fiddle: the dimensions of the private trade conducted by Assyrian rulers seems to indicate that they were not as wealthy as the other major merchants.[235] In their inscriptions, Old Assyrian rulers take credit for assorted building projects and for the implementation of various economic policies. In light of the powers of the *ālum*, it seems likely that such actions were taken at its behest or with its consent. As chief executive, the Old Assyrian ruler could count their implementation as his own achievement. Yet even in the quintessential genre of the executive, namely royal inscriptions,

[233] Larsen 1976: 129-147 and Erol 2018.
[234] Michel 2015b: 50-52.
[235] Erol 2018: 65. As Erol notes, this view may be distorted by the available evidence. It is conceivable that the ruler's wealth lay primarily in landholdings rather than commerce.

traces remain of the role of the *ālum*: frequently, it is said that the ruler did what he did in part "for the life of his *ālum*" (*ana balāṭ ālīšu*).[236]

The notion that the Old Assyrian ruler was an agent of the *ālum* is underwritten by an examination of the context and orthography of the title first adopted by Ṣilulu: *iššak Aššur*, viceroy of Aššur. This title is only half of a programmatic formula, namely *Aššur šarrum Ṣilulu iššak Aššur* (Aššur is king, Ṣilulu is the viceroy of Aššur).[237] In other words, sovereign power resides in Aššur, and Ṣilulu serves as supreme official on Aššur's behalf. In Ṣilulu's inscription, the word Aššur is qualified by the determinative sign for a geographical place.[238] Ṣilulu is, accordingly, claiming to act not as the viceroy of the god Aššur, but quite explicitly as the viceroy of the place.[239] The term Aššur as a designation for the city is interchangeable with *ālum*, the word that designates both the city and its assembly. Because power in the Old Assyrian period is vested in the city assembly and the evidence we have of Old Assyrian rulers concerns their functioning as agents of the assembly, Ṣilulu's programmatic formula should be understood as a two-part declaration. First, it is the city itself, conceived in corporate terms and

[236] Grayson 1987: A.0.31.1: 19-20; A.0.33.2: 12-13; A.0.33.3: 10-11; A.0.33.4: 10-11; A.0.33.5: 8-9; A.0.33.6: 10-11; A.0.33.7: 10-11; A.0.33.14: 21-22 (*balāṭ ālī* – the life of my *ālum*); A.0.33.15: 8-9; A.0.34.3: 9-10.
[237] Grayson 1987: A.0.27.1: *Aššur*^{ki} *šarrum Ṣilulu iššak Aššur*^{ki} *mer Dakiki nāgir ālum Aššur*^{ki} (Aššur is king, Ṣilulu is the viceroy of Aššur, the son of Dakiki, herald of the city Aššur).
[238] For a study of the orthography of Aššur in the Old Assyrian period, see Galter 1996. Galter 1996: 128 concludes that "in den altassyrischen Texten die Schreibungen *Assur*, ^{d}*Assur* und *Assur*^{ki} alternieren können und daß sich graphische Verwechslungen zwischen dem Gott und der Stadt zeigen."
[239] This distinction is underscored by the absence of any other contemporaneous evidence that equates the god Aššur with kingship, even though there is such evidence for multiple other gods. See Kryszat 2008: 116.

as constituted in the assembly, that is sovereign: the city is king. Second, the ruler is the viceroy, or plenipotentiary officer, of the *ālum*.

The aspirational quality of Old Assyrian rulership is evident in the representational choices of the rulers, most of whose seals are modelled on those of the Ur III kings who presided over much of Mesopotamia; in Ṣilulu's case, his seal includes the motif of trampling the enemy underfoot, which is more commonly and properly associated with conquerors than with local figureheads of the Old Assyrian type.[240] Similarly, two Old Assyrian rulers bear the names of the most famous of the Akkadian kings – Sargon and Naram-Sîn – who were paradigmatic of universal dominion. The Old Assyrian Sargon's name was even written with the determinative sign for a god, as was done for the original Sargon.[241] And yet Old Assyrian rulers hardly exercised dominion over their own city, let alone the ecumene as a whole. Perhaps it is the mismatch between the all-conquering Sargon of Agade and the non-conquering reality of the Old Assyrian Sargon that prompted the composition of the Old Assyrian Sargon Legend. This text records the exploits of the original Sargon with a level of hyperbole that stretches beyond the limits of the genre of royal inscriptions and veers into the realm of absurdity, featuring a range of possibly pejorative puns that impugn the character of Sargon; the text has,

[240] Eppihimer 2013; see figure 8 on page 42 for the image of Ṣilulu trampling over his enemy.
[241] See Grayson 1987. Inscriptions A.0.35.1 and A.0.35.2001 both reproduce Sargon's name with the divine determinative, writing ^{d}LUGAL.GIN in line with the conventions of Sargon of Agade.

accordingly, been interpreted as a parody.[242] Ridiculing the excessive self-praise and embellished achievements of the legendary Sargon could have been a clever way to ridicule the aspirations and claims of the contemporary Assyrian Sargon and his ilk – and all the more so because it served to highlight the extraordinary distance between the historical model and the contemporary imitation. At any rate, Old Assyrian rulers sought to enjoy the trappings of power,[243] to be the equals in every respect of the potentates with whom they came into contact, even as their power was comparatively limited in point of fact.

Until the reign of Erišum I (1972-1933), the title of all three rulers of Aššur who are attested in contemporary inscriptions is written out the same way as that of Ṣilulu[244] – they are uniformly viceroys of the place Aššur.[245] The distinction between Aššur as place and Aššur as god is all the more remarkable because there are separate references to the god Aššur in the

[242] For the edition of this text (Kt j/k 97), see Günbattı 1997; for interpretations of this text as satire or parody, see van de Mieroop 2000: 144-157, Foster 2002, and Foster 2005: 71-75. For opposing interpretations that regard the text as a serious work without satirical or parodic intent, see Hecker 2001, Cavigneaux 2005, Dercksen 2005, Alster and Oshima 2007, and J. Westenholz 2007. Pongratz-Leisten 2015: 152-157 situates the text in an Upper Mesopotamian cultural horizon, but this does not preclude a satirical purpose.

[243] This desire for the trappings of power is also apparent in the old palace of Aššur. For the archaeology of this structure, see Pedde and Lundström 2008: 27-31 and Preusser 1955: 6-13 and 28-29.

[244] Specifically Puzur-Aššur, Šalim-aḫum, and Ilu-Šumma; inscriptions survive for the latter two figures (see Grayson 1987: A.0.31 and A.0.32 respectively), both of whom refer to their ancestor Puzur-Aššur by the same title, written with the same geographic determinative.

[245] The inscription of Zarriqum (Grayson 1987: A. 0.1003.2001), the Ur III period governor of Aššur, preserves an aberrant writing of the term Aššur. In his title *šakkanak Aššur*, Aššur is rendered with the determinative signs for both deities and geographical places – "the city of the divine Aššur", or "the divine city Aššur". The simultaneous use of both determinatives is not attested in subsequent royal inscriptions.

inscriptions of two of these rulers.[246] In these instances, Aššur is written out with the determinative sign appropriate for a deity, indicating that there was a clear conceptual difference between the two. The orthographic emphasis on Aššur as a place in the titulature of the ruler erodes in the inscriptions of Erišum I. In his inscriptions, the title viceroy of Aššur is attested with the geographic determinative, the divine determinative, and with no determinative at all. In the inscriptions of all subsequent viceroys, Aššur is qualified exclusively with the divine determinative or left without one, the geographic determinative falling entirely into desuetude in this context. Regarded in isolation, the swift and total transition from qualifying Aššur with a geographic determinative, through a period of mixed usage, to its qualification with a divine determinative or no determinative at all can be regarded as little more than a change in orthographic conventions. Situated in its broader historical context, however, this transition can be understood as still another symptom of the aspirations of Assyrian rulers. Evidence from later periods in Assyrian history demonstrates that the ruler was the central figure in the worship of the god Aššur,[247] acting as high priest and as an indispensable ritual agent.[248] A similar role in the Old Assyrian period might account for the

[246] Šalim-aḫum states that "the god Aššur requested a temple from him", for which see Grayson 1987: A.0.31.1: 7-8: ^{d}*Aššur bītam īrissūma*. Ilu-Šumma adopts the epithet *narām* ^{d}*Aššur* (beloved of the god Aššur) and records that the god Aššur opened up two springs for him, for which see Grayson 1987: A.0.32.2: 30-34.

[247] The priestly function of the ruler is reflected in Kt n/k 821: 20-22, edited in Erol 2018: 60, in which the ruler writes to his correspondents that *pān Aššur u ilīya akarrabakkum* (I will pray for you before the god Aššur and my god). Interestingly, the ruler is distinguishing between the god Aššur and his personal god, indicating that they are not one and the same.

[248] For an overview of evidence of the centrality of the Assyrian ruler in the cult of Aššur, see van Driel 1969: 170-175. See also Pongratz-Leisten 2015: Chapter 5 for a discussion that examines the ideology of Assyrian kingship in the context of ancient Mesopotamia more broadly.

hereditary nature of the ruler's office and its life tenure, as well as for the ruler's part in building temples and administering justice, both of which are activities with unmistakable religious overtones.[249] The shift from viceroy of a place to viceroy of a god reframes the ruler's job description. He positions himself not as the agent of the *ālum*, a relationship in which he is the inferior partner to other humans, but as the agent of the god Aššur, a relationship in which the ruler – although nominally the inferior partner to the god – enjoys exclusive prerogatives that leverage the one area where he has significant freedom. In effect, the ruler is deemphasizing his inferiority to the *ālum* and focusing instead on his indispensability to the religious life of the community. Whatever the attempts of Old Assyrian rulers to arrogate more powers and greater status to themselves, there is scant indication that they had any great success beyond the symbolic.

The final institutional element in Aššur's political landscape is the office of the *līmum*. Beginning at least as early as 1972 BCE,[250] every year an individual in Aššur was selected to be the *līmum*, after whom the year itself was named (hence the standard English translation

[249] See Hertel 2013: 35-42 for an account of the role of the Old Assyrian ruler in the administration of justice.
[250] The Kültepe Eponym List begins its sequence of *līmum*s in 1972, the first year of Erišum I's reign. It opens with the statement *ištu līmum iššiknuni* (after the *līmum* had been instituted), for which see Veenhof 2003a: Chapter 2. This suggests Erišum's reign as the origin of the *līmum*. The Assyrian King List, however, says of the six kings preceding Erišum I that *līmānīšunu lā uddûni* (their *līmum*s are not marked), for which see Grayson 1980-83: 105 (and see Freydank 1975 for the reading of *uddûni* as a D stem stative form of the verb *idā'um* with the subjunctive marker). This implies that there were *līmum*s before Erišum, but that they were not recorded systematically, or perhaps not associated with year names as they were henceforth.

"eponym").[251] Prosopographical analysis of the *līmum* officials suggests that they were chosen from the upper strata of Assyrian society, bound together by significant family bonds and by participation in joint mercantile ventures.[252] The annual rotation of *līmum*s indicates a common interest among this body of leading Assyrians in sharing the perks and burdens of office – as well as in preventing the excessive concentration of power in the hands of any one individual. In addition to its calendrical function, the office of the *līmum* presided over the *bēt ālim* (City Hall), which was also known as the *bēt līmim* (house of the *līmum*).[253] Under the leadership of the *līmum* and a constellation of other officials,[254] this institution was entrusted with running many of the quotidian affairs of the *ālum*. The function of the *līmum* and the *bēt ālim* as the *ālum*'s executive is manifest in a text where the *līmum* and the *ālum* are interchangeable, demonstrating the former's position as the representative of the latter.[255] The affairs of the *bēt ālim* included overseeing the standard weights and measures used in commerce, active participation in the buying and selling of goods, supervision of the city granary, collecting certain taxes, and extending credit to merchants.[256] Most prominent in our sources, however, is

[251] For the relevant texts, see Veenhof 2003a: Chapter 2 and Günbattı 2008. For a complete reconstruction of the Old Assyrian eponym sequence, see Barjamovic, Hertel, and Larsen 2012: Appendix 1.
[252] See Larsen 1976: 209-211, Veenhof 2003b: 80-82, Larsen 2015: 124-126, and Dercksen 2004: 58-59.
[253] The identity of the *bēt ālim* and the *bēt līmim* is already noted by J. Lewy 1955: 156, fn. 4.
[254] For an overview of this constellation of officials, see Dercksen 2004: Chapter 4. For the multiplicity of lower-ranking *līmum* officials (sub- or vice-*līmum*s) with specialized jurisdictions, see Dercksen 2004: 60-62 and Larsen 2015: 127.
[255] See Moren 1981: text 3; in this letter, an Assyrian merchant states that he owes silver to the *līmum*, before describing his repayment of that debt (along with the requisite fees and the promise to pay interest) to the *ālum*. Owing money to the *līmum* is thus regarded as conceptually synonymous with owing money to the *ālum*.
[256] Dercksen 2004: Chapter 3. See also Veenhof 2003b: 98-102, Larsen 1976: Part Two: Chapter 3, and Larsen 2015: Chapter 10, especially pages 127-129.

the *bēt ālim*'s role in overseeing and enforcing the payment of debts that could accrue from its extension of credit to merchants or from failure to pay taxes or fines.[257] Numerous texts speak to the threat and reality of the confiscation of goods by the *līmum* as a penalty for the non-payment of debts. In one example, a woman writes to her brothers that the *līmum uša'daranni u amātīya iktanatta* (the *līmum* frightens me and he keeps seizing my slave girls as security);[258] in other texts, entire estates are at risk of confiscation.[259] The *līmum* was an office with real power and had considerable authority to oblige debtors to pay their debts or face dire consequences.

It is not clear where the boundary between the powers of the ruler and those of the *līmum* should be drawn. They both appear to act as executive agents of the *ālum*, and the texts do suggest generally non-overlapping jurisdictions. The *līmum*'s duties focus on the management of the everyday business of commerce, taxation, communal grain storage, and related matters. By contrast, the ruler is occupied primarily with tasks that pertain to dispensing justice and the construction of public infrastructure like temple buildings and city walls. Although the *līmum* and the ruler both act on behalf of the *ālum*, there is insufficient evidence to reconstruct the extent to which they can act autonomously or the extent to which the *ālum* enjoyed effective oversight. It is likewise impossible to reconstruct with any great

[257] Dercksen 2004: Chapter 3.
[258] Thureau-Dangin 1928: 2: 46: 7-10.
[259] See Dercksen 2004: 48-51 for further examples.

specificity the processes and mechanisms by which these three institutions interacted, or their precise division of powers beyond general spheres. That they interacted is brought to life in a recently published verdict of the *ālum*: *ṭuppum ša dīn ālim ṭuppum ša šīm bētim ša šabā'ē ša kunuk līmim u ṭuppum ša malqiātim rubā'um ikannakma ana bēt ālim errubū* (The tablet with the verdict of the *ālum*, the deed of sale of the house with the seal of the *līmum*, and the tablet of the revenues – the ruler will seal [them] and they will enter City Hall).[260] The *ālum*, *līmum*, and ruler are all shown working together in the conduct of government.

There is almost no evidence of the conduct of official religion in Aššur in the Old Assyrian period. It is, however, in this time that the Aššur temple is built and occasionally restored or rebuilt at no small communal expense.[261] Regardless of the god Aššur's origins and oddities, it is also in this time that he can be seen operating as a conventional deity. Aššur is recorded alongside other gods in treaties, royal inscriptions, and other texts, he is the object of devotion like other gods, and he is given agency like other gods, asking Assyrian rulers to undertake certain tasks for him and "loving" them. Aššur, moreover, has an overwhelming symbolic importance.[262] He is the chief god, and he functions as the symbolic embodiment of the place and the community he represents. Aššur's symbolic function is facilitated by his lexical

[260] Kt 92/k 491, for which see Veenhof 2015. As Veenhof 2015: makes clear, the phrase *ṭuppum ša šīm bētim ša šabā'ē* is literally "the tablet of quittance of the price of the house", which is more comfortably rendered in English as "the deed of sale of the house".
[261] Haller and Andrae 1955: 9-14.
[262] See Girtler 1982: 48-49 for an account of humankind as an "animal symbolicum". Girtler argues that groups are bound together by common symbols and that these symbols are essential for the perpetuation of a group identity.

identity with the city, creating the conditions for the semantic multiplicity that allows him to function as a cypher for the *ālum* and thus for the Assyrian community as a whole. This multiplicity is readily apparent in Old Assyrian names, for instance. These names conform to broader Akkadian onomastic practices, and generally consist of a brief statement involving a god.[263] The overwhelming importance of Aššur is reflected in the fact that almost half of all Old Assyrian names involving a god feature Aššur as their divine element; another 4%, however, have the word *ālum* (city) where the divine element would normally be.[264] Many of the names involving the elements Aššur or *ālum* are otherwise identical. We have, for example, the name *Ilī-Aššur* (my god is Aššur), and the name *Ilī-ālum* (my god is the city);[265] there is *Aššur-ṭāb* (Aššur is good) and *Āl-ṭāb* (the city is good);[266] *Aššur-bēlī* (Aššur is my lord) and *Āl-bēlī* (the city is my lord);[267] and, with grammatical variation but semantic identity, *Ālī-abum* (my city is the father) and *Abīni-Aššur* (our father is Aššur).[268] In most cases, there is no discernible semantic differentiation between Aššur and *ālum* in the Old Assyrian onomastic data: the two terms occupy the same positions within names, so that it often becomes impossible to decide whether the term Aššur should itself be understood as referring to the city or to the god. Such

[263] For a survey of Akkadian names, see Stamm 1939 and Edzard 1998-2001. Especially relevant for the sorts of names discussed here are Stamm 1939: Chapters 9 and 10. For Old Assyrian onomastics in particular, see Eidem 2004 and Larsen 2015: 281-282. For an outdated but still useful list of Old Assyrian names, see Stephens 1928.
[264] Eidem 2004: 194. This is not without parallel elsewhere in the Akkadian onomastic tradition, for which see Stamm 1939: 83.
[265] See Albayrak and Erol 2016: 5: 2 and passim for Ilī-ālum, and 29: 2 for Ilī-Aššur.
[266] See Larsen 2013: 482: 18 for Aššur-ṭāb and 305: 10 Āl-ṭāb.
[267] See S. Smith 1924: 30: 8 for Aššur-bēlī and 37b: 28 for Āl-bēlī.
[268] See Bayram and Kuzuoğlu 2014: 83: 2 and passim for Ālī-abum and 306: 20 for Abīni-Aššur.

ambiguation is equally apparent in in a late seventeenth century letter that was likely written by an Assyrian ruler to his counterpart in Tigunānum. In this letter, the term Aššur appears twice with the divine determinative, twice with the determinative marker for a city, and once with both determinatives simultaneously; it is, moreover, written out in two variant forms.[269] There are no consistent semantic reasons for preferring any single rendering of Aššur to others at different moments in the text. The impression of fundamental interchangeability between these writings is unmistakable, accounting for the flexibility in the use of determinatives to mark the noun Aššur in otherwise identical textual contexts. Indeed, the range of overlapping meanings that inhere in the term Aššur fosters the obfuscation of the boundaries between these concepts. The noun appears across text genres as an object of reverence and is the name of god and place, but also of a category of people in the formula "children of Aššur". We have here an original holy trinity: the agglutination of god, place, and people as distinct faces of what is presented as an underlying unity.[270]

In summary, in the Old Assyrian context, the governance of the city Aššur was divided between three main institutional poles: the *ālum*, the ruler, and the *līmum* – an assembly of leading individuals, a hereditary head-of-state, and an annually rotating executive officer.

[269] George et al 2017: 99 (Lambert Folios 7637, 8202). There is ^{d}A.LÁL.SAR in lines 4 and 38, ^{uru}*aš-šu-ur* in line 11, ^{uru}A.LÁL.SAR in line 35, and $^{uru.d}$A.LÁL.SAR in line 22. For the lexical equation A.LÁL.SAR = Aššur, see ḪAR-ra *ḫubullu* IV: 278, giš.má.A.LÁL.SAR^{ki} = *aš-šu-ri-tum* (Landsberger 1957: 174).

[270] This is a slight emendation of the position of Lambert 1983: 83, which argues that "all this evidence points to one obvious conclusion: that the god Aššur is the deified city." More than the deified city, he is the deified community as manifest both in the city and metaphorical children, the *mer'ū Aššur*.

Foremost among these poles was the *ālum*, the collective body that was synonymous with the city itself and on whose behalf the ruler and the *līmum* appear to have acted. The early separation of powers that characterizes the constitution of government in Aššur is indicative of a corporate dimension in the operation of this social world. No single individual controlled the city's affairs, and neither could any single individual hope to do so, try as the rulers might. The tripartite foundation of Assyrian government reflects the diffusion of power among a broad group of people.[271] This group of people are the children of Aššur.

3.2.2 Kanesh and its Offshoots – Assyrian Anatolia

Many children of Aššur spent much of their lives away from the city of Aššur. There were numerous communities of Assyrian merchants along the trade routes that they traversed. Our evidence only permits an investigation of Assyrian trade toward and in Anatolia, but similar arrangements might have prevailed along trade routes into the Zagros and toward southern Mesopotamia, sources of tin and textiles respectively.[272] The network of Assyrian settlements and trading outposts in Anatolia subsisted and thrived on the proceeds of trade. Assyrian

[271] Collective action theory suggests that the diffusion of power among many is what brings about the sorts of collective polities that are akin to Aššur in their corporate dimension. See Blanton and Fargher 2009: 134: "According to collective action theory, the form taken by a state depends in large part on the outcome of bargains struck between those in positions of state authority ('rulers') and non-ruling groups, especially taxpayers… States that are more collective are predicted to develop if rulers are forced to strike bargains with other civil society groups, especially when rulers are strongly dependent on taxpayers for state revenues, including labor. In collective states, more public goods are provided, ruler power is restricted and they are more accountable." This model suggests that the primacy of the *ālum* was asserted and secured against the ruler (the earlier *šakkanakkum*) before becoming normative by the Old Assyrian period, though there is insufficient evidence of earlier periods to pursue that idea.

[272] For evidence of Assyrian activity in Sippar, see Walker 1980 and Veenhof 1991.

merchants assembled textiles and tin in Aššur before shipping them to Anatolia, where they were exchanged for silver and gold that was then sent to Aššur.[273] In Anatolia itself, Assyrian merchants were involved in exchange between Anatolian communities, notably in the copper trade.[274] Larger Assyrian merchant communities were organized as *kārum*s (the Akkadian word for a quay, which came to designate trading quarters more broadly) and the smaller ones as *wabartum*s (trading posts).[275] We know of the existence of approximately 40 distinct Assyrian *kārum*s and *wabartum*s,[276] which gives an indication of the scale and scope of Assyrian mercantile activity.

In their internal organization, Assyrian communities abroad reproduced the major element of Assyrian governance at home. Just as the *ālum* was the principal authority in Aššur, assemblies dominated the conduct of affairs among Assyrians in Anatolia. Also like *ālum* Aššur, these assemblies were eponymous with the communities they represented, so that, for example, the *kārum* in Kanesh was known as *kārum Kanesh* and the *wabartum* in Kuššara was known as the *wabartum ša Kuššara*. Participation in these assemblies was restricted to members of the Assyrian communities they served. Given the much smaller numbers of Assyrians who lived in these communities when compared to Aššur,[277] their assemblies tended

[273] For an overview of the trade that includes a fuller account of goods traded and further bibliography, see Veenhof 2008c: 79-93 and Barjamovic 2011: Chapter One.
[274] On the Old Assyrian copper trade in Anatolia, see the aptly-titled Dercksen 1996.
[275] See Veenhof 2010a: 44-46 for a brief overview of the Assyrian system of *kārum*s and *wabartum*s in Anatolia.
[276] As per Barjamovic 2011: 5 and Larsen 2015: 148.
[277] Aššur's population in the Old Assyrian period has been estimated around 7-10,000 people, though this figure is based more on settlement size than on solid demographic data. See Larsen 2000: 79.

to be more representative. Where there is only one attestation of a plenary assembly in Aššur – the *ālum ṣaḫer rabi* (the city, small and great) – these plenary assemblies appear to have been the norm in the *kārum*s, whose assemblies are very often designated *kārum* X *ṣaḫer rabi* (the *kārum* of X, small and great). Like their counterparts in Aššur, Assyrian elders in Anatolia appear to have been prominent among (if not synonymous with) the *rabiūtum* (the great ones) in the assemblies.[278] An important status distinction between small and great Assyrians was related to the payment of *dātum*-fees, which allowed wealthier Assyrians to be counted along with the other bigwigs.[279] There is little concrete indication of who counted as the *ṣaḫḫurūtum* (the small ones), but they probably consisted of all remaining free Assyrian men. Despite status distinctions between Assyrians in Anatolia, the high number of references to plenary assemblies suggests a high level of political participation by the *ṣaḫḫurūtum*. In the *wabartum*s, the number of Assyrians will have been so small as to render the division of the assembly by social status impractical. Even the assemblies in some *kārum*s were small. In the *kārum* of Burušhaddum, one text implies that the assembly consisted of fifteen men.[280] Smaller Assyrian populations would account for more inclusive governance of Assyrian communities in Anatolia,

[278] See letter KTK 20 in Larsen 1976: 165, where the elders and *kārum* Kanesh appear to function as synonyms.
[279] Dercksen 2004: 119-125.
[280] Kt 94/k 1267 in Larsen 2010: text 111; see in particular Larsen's commentary on page 193. Lines 1-10 in this text list fifteen male names, who are then said to have sat in council (*puḫrum*). It is unclear, however, if this was an ad hoc meeting attended by a motley selection of Assyrians, a gathering of the *kārum ṣaḫer rabi* as a whole, or an exclusive gathering of the *kārum* – that is, only the *rabiūtum*. The outcome of the assembly, namely the decision to prohibit commercial activity with a local official, would indicate an official meeting of some sort.

with participation increasing in proportion to the diminishing size of a given Assyrian *kārum* or *wabartum*.

Assyrian assemblies abroad exercised internal authority, representing the collective interests of their communities, issuing decrees, collecting taxes, regulating commerce, and overseeing the Assyrians under their jurisdiction.[281] Assemblies taking action are a prominent feature of the evidence from Kanesh. The same text that refers to fifteen members of the assembly in Burushaddum also demonstrates the power of this assembly. In the wake of a protracted dispute with a local Anatolian official named Ušinalam, the text reports on a meeting of the assembly and its outcome: *mimma awīlū annīūtum ina puḫrim ina kārim Burušḫaddim ušbū umma šunūma ṣubātam šumšu mimma ana Ušinalam lā taddan* (all of these men deliberated in a gathering in the *kārum* of Burushaddum and they resolved: "Sell no textile whatsoever to Ušinalam!").[282] We see here an example of a local assembly convening to tackle a local problem and deciding to prohibit any further commercial engagement with an official. The assumption is that this decision will have applied to any Assyrian in Burushaddum, and it will have been the responsibility of the assembly to ensure its resolution was implemented and observed.[283] There are numerous attestations of assemblies issuing instructions on the model

[281] See Dercksen 2004: Chapter 6. Dercksen focuses on *kārum* Kanesh, but scaled down the same role and obligations will have been the purview of each *kārum* and *wabartum*.
[282] Kt 94/k 1267 in Larsen 2010: text 111: 11-18.
[283] The Ušinalam affair is ultimately referred both to Kanesh and to representatives of the *ālum* in Kanesh. This is documented primarily in Kt 94/k 842 and Kt 94/k 917, texts 109 and 110 in Larsen 2010. In these texts the *kārum Burushaddum ṣaḫer rabi* corresponds with the *kārum Kaniš ṣaḫer rabi*, but the *šiprū ša ālim* are very much involved.

of the *ālum*.[284] Like their counterparts issued by the *ālum*, these instructions are meant to be observed and enforced. In one example, a merchant and his caravan are adjured not to smuggle and are threatened with justice should they fail to comply: *umma kārum Kanišma ana Aššur-emūqī u ellatīšu qibīma mamman annakam u ṣubātī ulā upazzar ša upazzuru awāt kārim ikaššassi* (Thus speaks *kārum* Kanesh: tell Aššur-emūqī and his caravan that nobody is to smuggle tin or textiles. Whoever smuggles, the instruction of the *kārum* will overtake them!).[285]

When acting in their own capacity, assemblies possessed all the hallmarks of autonomous bodies. Their decisions, communications, and transactions could be sealed with a communal seal. Impressions of multiple such seals from at least eight distinct *kārum*s and *wabartum*s have been recovered, expressing the formula *kunuk kārim* X (the seal of *kārum* X) or *kunuk wabartim* X (the seal of *wabartum* X); in several instances, the seals are in the name of the plenary assembly of a given *kārum*, as expressed in the formula *kunuk kārim ṣaḫer rabi* (the seal of the *kārum*, small and great).[286] Assyrian communities could retain an official scribe (*ṭupšarrum*), who could be asked to perform a range of administrative tasks.[287] They could also appoint official envoys (*šiprum ša kārim*) to convey their decisions or to communicate on their behalf.[288] In one instance, *kārum* Kanesh empowers an envoy to apprehend and bring to

[284] See Hertel 2013: 99-113 and 115-126.
[285] Kt c/k 1055, for which see Hertel 2013: 108, note 435 and Veenhof 1995: 1732.
[286] Hecker 2003: 190-195.
[287] Hertel 2013: 126-132.
[288] Hertel 2013: 113-114.

Kanesh someone travelling in a caravan. In the letter to the caravan, it is clear that the envoy is to be obeyed in his capacity as an agent of the *kārum*: *umma kārum Kaniš ana ālikī qibīma… Ṭāb-ṣilli-Aššur šiparni išti Ṭāb-ṣilli-Aššur litūram* (Thus speaks *kārum* Kanesh: tell the travelers… Ṭāb-ṣilli-Aššur is our envoy; [the man to be apprehended] is to come back with Ṭāb-ṣilli-Aššur).[289] In Kanesh, if not necessarily in smaller Assyrian communities, there was also a replication of the institutions of *ālum* Aššur. Analogous to Aššur's *bēt ālim* was *kārum* Kanesh's *bēt kārim*, responsible for administering the *kārum*'s business. Kanesh even had its own *līmum* officials, as well as *ḫamuštum* officials after whom weeks were named.[290] There is no indication that the *ḫamuštum* officials had any responsibilities beyond lending their name to designated periods of time for calendrical purposes.

The concentration of administrative and calendrical institutions in Kanesh is indicative of the hierarchical nature of Assyrian settlement in Anatolia. For much of the Old Assyrian period, the centerpiece of the system of trading settlements was Kanesh, whose *kārum* enjoyed authority over the others and served as the heart of the entire Assyrian presence in the region. Decisions made by *kārum* Kanesh could be imposed throughout the Assyrian communities, and it was to Kanesh that these communities looked when they were in need of leadership or assistance. Likewise, when *wabartum*s and *kārum*s could not settle disputes or needed further instruction, they referred to Kanesh. But *kārum* Kanesh was not the endpoint of Assyrian

[289] Veenhof 2017a: text 285: 1-4 and 13-16.
[290] Dercksen 2004: 243-244.

authority. When *kārum* Kanesh was itself in need of leadership or assistance, or proved unable to resolve a matter, it referred to the highest jurisdiction, namely *ālum* Aššur. The *chaîne opératoire* of Old Assyrian justice thus proceeds from lower to higher jurisdictions, from the *wabartum*s and *kārum*s to *kārum* Kanesh, and from Kanesh to the *ālum*.[291] Political authority in this system traverses the same path in reverse, from the *ālum* to Kanesh, and from Kanesh to lower-order *kārum*s and *wabartum*s. There was an ongoing stream of communication and movement of people between Aššur and Anatolia to make this possible, including envoys of the *ālum* and petitioners in search of justice and conflict resolution. One letter from an official in Aššur to *kārum* Kanesh offers an illustration of this hierarchy of authority in practice: *ešret šiqil kaspam gamram ša dūrim ālum ēmudūkunūma… attunu ammākam i'dāma ana mala ṭuppim ša ālim šuprāma karē kaspam šašqilā* (The city imposed upon you a levy of ten sheqels of silver for the fortification… You must take care there to write in accordance with the instruction of the *ālum* and make the *kārum*s pay the silver).[292] In this letter, we see the *ālum* collecting funds from Assyrian communities in Anatolia for the construction of fortifications in Aššur. It is clearly within the *ālum*'s power to do so, and its demands are communicated to *kārum* Kanesh. It is within *kārum* Kanesh's power, in turn, to collect some of the funds from smaller Assyrian communities in Anatolia, which the *kārum* is instructed to do. The *ālum* thus takes a decision

[291] Hertel 2013: 346-380 offers two extended case studies in the practice of Old Assyrian legal procedures. These case studies are an outstanding exercise in illuminating Old Assyrian institutional justice on the basis of well documented episodes.
[292] Contenau 1920: 1: 4-6 and 23-27; see also the translation of Larsen 1976: 163.

that applies to the Assyrians of Anatolia, and entrusts its implementation to *kārum* Kanesh, the central node in the Assyrian system there. Despite its geographical distance from the Assyrian settlements in Anatolia, Aššur served as their highest court of arbitration and wielded supreme political authority, both of which were channeled through Kanesh.

Aššur's supremacy over Assyrians in Anatolia extended beyond the legal and political.[293] Aššur served as a binding symbol for Assyrians, who appear to have constructed sanctuaries for the god Aššur in their expatriate communities.[294] The only direct reference to such a temple comes from a colorful letter written by the *kārum* of Uršu to *kārum* Kanesh:

> *ana kārim Kaniš qibīma umma kāru Uršūma ša ištu dūrim lā ibšiuni šarruqū ana bēt Aššur ērubūma šamšam ša ḫurāṣim ša irti Aššur u patram ša Aššur išriqū u mīšurum kallubū samru'ātum u katappu tablū bētum laqut mimma lā ēzibū šarriqī niše''ēma lā nimmar abbāūni bēlūni attunu ammākam malākunu*[295]
>
> Say to *kārum* Kanesh, thus speaks *kārum* Uršu: that which never happened before (has happened). Thieves have broken into the temple of Aššur and have stolen the golden sun on Aššur's chest and Aššur's dagger; the *mišurum*, *kalubū*, *samru'ātum*, and *katappu*

[293] See Larsen 2007 for an account of Aššur's dominance in the conduct of Assyrian trade in Anatolia despite its remoteness.
[294] Hertel 2013: 196-202 argues that each Assyrian community is likely to have had its own sacred precinct; Dercksen 2004: 101 makes a compelling argument for the existence of an Aššur temple in Kanesh.
[295] Sayce 1912: text 7: 6-7 and 16-17. For a translation, transliteration, an discussion of this text that has benefited greatly from the steady advance of Assyriological knowledge, see Larsen 1976: 261-262 and fn. 37.

have been carried off. The temple is stripped clean. They didn't leave a thing! We searched for the thieves but have not found them. You are our fathers and our lords! Advise us there!

This letter indicates not only that the *kārum* in Uršu had its own Aššur temple, but that this temple was equipped with a variety of valuable items. It is also another good illustration of the practical functioning of the Assyrian hierarchy. Unable to resolve a local problem and desperate for assistance, *kārum* Uršu beseeches *kārum* Kanesh for help. The letter further suggests that Aššur temples were repositories for various items associated with Aššur that had significant ritual importance. Foremost among these is the *patrum ša Aššur* – the dagger of Aššur. A very large number of Old Assyrian texts involving legal procedures include the swearing of oaths before the dagger of Aššur, and a smaller number before the *šugarriāum* of Aššur.[296] As symbols of Aššur, the use of these items asserted time and again the primacy of Aššur. Among Assyrians in Anatolia, verdicts of the assembly and mundane legal procedures invoked Aššur. This was true in smaller settlements, as in the following example from *kārum* Ḫaḫḫum: *ana awātim anniātim kārum Ḫaḫḫum iddinniātīma maḫar patrim ša Aššur šībūtīni niddin* (*kārum* Ḫaḫḫum issued these instructions to us and we gave our testimony before the dagger of

[296] On the dagger of Aššur and variants with other instruments, see Hertel 2013: 196-202. See Donbaz 2001 for the proposal that the *patrum* and *šugarriāum* were wielded by eponymous priests/officials. Among the many examples of swearing by the dagger of Aššur are Kt c/k 1194, Kt c/k 1167, and Kt c/k 1230, texts 25, 42, and 144 in Albayrak and Erol 2016. Swearing by the *šugarriāum* of Aššur is attested in Kt c/k 1472 and Kt c/k 1518, texts 139 and 142 in Albayrak and Erol 2016. The range of uses of the dagger of Aššur is manifest in the texts of Veenhof 2017a. Kt 91/k 494 involves testifying before the dagger (text 203: 24), Kt 86/k 155A/B involves swearing by the dagger (text 210: 5), and Kt 92/k 97 involves the presentation of a tablet before the dagger (text 279: 22).

Aššur).[297] It was equally true in Kanesh, as in this instance: *kārum Kaniš ṣaḫer rabi maḫar patrim ša Aššur ina ḫamrim dīnam iddinma* (the *kārum* of Kanesh, small and great, issued a verdict before the dagger of Aššur in the sacred precinct).[298] Through various proxies, Aššur acted as a great symbolic glue among Assyrians everywhere.

As we have seen, Assyrian communities in Anatolia enjoyed extensive autonomy. Each *kārum* and *wabartum* had its own assembly, and these assemblies were knitted together in a system that was coordinated and overseen from Kanesh and ultimately from distant Aššur. This is remarkable in light of the fact that the Assyrian presence in Anatolia was not established or maintained by force of arms. Assyrian communities were vastly outnumbered by the people among whom they lived and were entirely at the mercy of local potentates. To ensure their safety, freedom of movement, and communal rights, Assyrians negotiated treaties with the relevant authorities wherever they operated.[299] Three treaty texts and one apparent draft treaty are currently known.[300] They all share broad similarities in content and structure. The treaties are contracted with local authorities (those of Kanesh, Ḫaḫḫum, and Apum in our texts) on behalf of the Assyrian community, and they regulate relations between the *mer'ū* Aššur (children of Aššur) and the subjects of the treaty partner. The treaty between the native king of

[297] Matouš and Matoušová-Rajmová 1984: text 2: 16-20.
[298] Hecker, Kryszat, and Matouš 1998: 445: 1-4.
[299] For an overview of the evidence and content of the treaties entered into by Assyrians, see Hertel 2013: 57-63.
[300] Two treaties were found in Kültepe (Kt 00/k 6 and Kt 00/k 10), for which see Günbattı 2004, and a fragmentary treaty was found in Tell Leilan, for which see Eidem 1991 and 2011. The draft treaty (Kt n/k 974) was also found in Kültepe, for which see Çeçen and Hecker 1995.

Kanesh and *kārum* Kanesh offers extended insight into the basis of the Assyrian relationship with local authorities.[301] Lines 14-38 and 69-72 govern the various taxes that native authorities are entitled to levy from Assyrian merchants, as well as the conditions and procedures according to which they are to be levied. These taxes constitute an unparalleled source of income for the king of Kanesh and are functionally the purchasing price of local sufferance for the Assyrian presence. In return for these taxes, Assyrians are granted extraordinary rights: Assyrians are granted the freedom to engage in their commercial activities, protected from violence, promised restitution for harm done or losses incurred at the hands of native subjects, guaranteed property rights, assured of recourse to justice in case of a dispute, exempted from local service obligations,[302] and permitted to swear by the dagger or the *šugarriāum* of Aššur in legal proceedings[303] – to name but some of their explicit privileges. As we know from the Old Assyrian evidence as a whole, Assyrian communities are essentially at liberty to conduct their affairs as they wish, to regulate themselves, and to live and move about in Anatolia in return for a share of their profits. For a few centuries at least, this arrangement appears to have been agreeable to Assyrians and native authorities alike.

3.3 The *mer'ū Aššur* in their Categorical Contexts

[301] Kt 00/k 6 in Günbattı 2004: 251-255.
[302] Lines 78-81: *inūmi mātka ana unuššim talapputuni mer Aššur šumšu ana unuššim lā talapputuni* (when you call up your country for *unuššum*-service, you will not call up any Assyrian whomsoever for *unuššum*-service). See Dercksen 2004b: 140-147 for an account of *unuššum*-service. Exemption from service is a key symbolic stipulation, as it is an effective renunciation of any claim to sovereignty over Assyrians.
[303] Lines 88-89.

3.3.1 In Aššur

The political landscape in Aššur was of, for, and by the *mer'ū* Aššur. What, then, were the contours of this social category? What did it mean to be a child of Aššur – an Assyrian? Assyrianness was an aggregate category with several distinct constituent elements. First and foremost among these elements was the Assyrian relationship with the *ālum*. As we have seen, the *ālum* was the embodiment of Assyrian public life. It was the sovereign collective body that represented and governed the children of Aššur, and it was synonymous with the place Aššur; indeed, the *ālum* was one of the principal ingredients in that semantic soup that allowed the god Aššur, the place Aššur, and the people Aššur in the form of the *ālum* to function as largely interchangeable concepts. To be Assyrian, you needed to be of the *ālum*. This presupposes participation in the civic life of Aššur: its religion, its politics, and its social networks. But who does this exclude?

Perhaps the most obvious axis of exclusion is that of place. In the Old Assyrian texts, Assyrians distinguish members of other social categories using expansive geographic designations. Three such categories are attested in a decree of the *ālum*, describing different kinds of non-Assyrians in the immediate environment of Aššur. This decree prohibits the selling of gold by Assyrians *ana Akkidêm Amurrêm ū Šubirîm* (to an Akkadian, Amorite, or Subarean).[304] These three groups correspond to the peoples living to the south, west, and north of Aššur

[304] Kt 79/k 101: 19-21 in Sever 1990: 260-262.

respectively.[305] At least in the case of the Subareans, there also appears to have been a pronounced linguistic barrier dividing them from Assyrians.[306] As is implied by the decree banning the sale of gold to Akkadians, Amorites, and Subareans, these categories had real purchase from the point of view of Assyrian government. Members of these categories were not considered Assyrian, and their interactions with children of Aššur could be and sometimes were regulated. Such regulation is further attested in the two surviving inscriptions of the Assyrian ruler Ilu-Šumma. Both inscriptions record the implementation of policies that pertain to the Akkadians as a category: *addurār Akkadî u marêšunu aškun erašunu amsi ištu pāne midrim u Ur u Nippur Awal u Kismar Dēr ša Ištarān adi ālim addurāršunu aškun* (I established the freedom of the Akkadians and their children. I purified their copper. I established their freedom from the border of the *midrum* and Ur and Nippur, Awal, and Kismar, Dēr of the god Ištaran, as far as the *ālum* [Aššur]).[307] These measures likely amount to a liberalization of the terms of access of Akkadian merchants to the Assyrian market, and possibly to an exemption from various taxes and imposts in order to stimulate movement of merchants and the flow of goods to Aššur.[308] The need to delimit the territory covered by this decree – functionally all of

[305] The same combination of categories is attested in a roughly contemporary text from Mari. See A.109, cited in Durand 1992: 125 and in Veenhof 2008a: 19.
[306] Subareans are thought to have spoken Hurrian, a language unrelated to the Akkadian dialect of Aššur. The linguistic barrier between Subareans and Assyrians is apparent in Kt 91/k 539: 29-31: *ṭuppam ana ṭupšarrim ša šubiriattam išammeu dīmma lištassi* (Give the tablet to a scribe who understands Šubarian so that he can read it). The text is edited as Text 1 in Veenhof 2008a, which also has a discussion of Subareans in the Old Assyrian evidence on pages 12-16.
[307] A.0.32.2: 49-65 in Grayson 1987: 17-18. In A.0.32.1: 14-16, it is said of Ilu-šumma that *addurār Akkadî iškun* (he established the freedom of the Akkadians). See Grayson 1987: 15.
[308] See Veenhof 2003b: 83-85 and Veenhof 2008c: 126-130.

southern Mesopotamia – indicates that Assyrians recognized that "Akkadians" did not constitute a single, undifferentiated mass, even if they wrote about them and legislated for them in generalized terms. The same recognition of difference should likewise be assumed of the Assyrian view of Subareans and Amorites, even if it is not manifest in our texts. Whatever their nuances on the micro-level, Assyrians recognized and used categories that described outsiders from the perspective of geography, with all of its cultural and linguistic associations.

For all that people could be excluded from the Assyrian social category on the basis of place, this is only one dimension of Assyrianness. After all, people could spend their entire lives in Anatolia and still be regarded as Assyrian, while Aššur almost certainly had a resident population of foreign merchants who were not regarded as Assyrian despite their presence in the city. The difference between these two groups is their embeddedness in Assyrian civic life. Assyrians were organized into patrilineal kinship networks, with each family head enjoying broad authority over their subordinates in a hierarchical system.[309] The organization of Assyrian society on the basis of kinship is reflected in the language used to describe relationships between Assyrians. Assyrians of equal rank address each other as brothers (*aḫum*), while those of superior and inferior rank are fathers and sons respectively (*abum* and *mer'um*).[310] The genealogical expression of relative social status demonstrates the extent to which family

[309] Hertel 2015 offers an analysis of the Old Assyrian patrilineal family unit. See also Larsen 2007.
[310] Assyrians are not unique in this regard. The same language is used to describe hierarchical relationships in many ancient Near Eastern settings.

relations inflect social thought. It also lends itself readily to conceiving of all Assyrians as members of a single extended family, a conception furthered by the Old Assyrian terminology for Assyrianness: all Assyrians are the children of Aššur, and thus related by ties of kinship. In the same decree prohibiting the sale of gold to non-Assyrians, it is noted explicitly that Assyrians are permitted to sell gold to each other: *awātum ša ḫuraṣim pāniātumma aḫum ana aḫim ana šīmim iddan* (the previous instruction concerning gold [still applies]: Assyrians may sell gold to each other).[311] This passage does not feature the word Aššur in any form, instead conveying the notion of Assyrians by stating literally that "a brother may sell to a brother", i.e. an "Assyrian may sell to an Assyrian". The nominally fraternal relationship of all Assyrians is implicit and assumed – all Assyrians are equals in status, and thus brothers. This conceptual framework of universal Assyrian kinship was underwritten by the actual web of kinship units that together formed Assyrian society. To have a place in Assyrian society, one needed a place within an existing Assyrian kinship network. This idea is illustrated by a letter in which a woman complains to her husband that he lent silver to an Assyrian without a *bētum* – a house: *apputtum mīnum ša ana Ennānāt-Aššur kaspam tuššir ana lānīšu tatikil lā bētam lā šarram īšu u kaspam tuššir* (please, what is this that you released silver to Ennānāt-Aššur? You trusted his appearance, and yet he has no house and no child, and still you released the silver!).[312] Ennānāt-Aššur was an Assyrian, as his name implies. A good Assyrian was expected to have a

[311] Kt 79/k 101: 11-15 in Sever 1990: 260-262.
[312] Kt 92/k 233: 5-10 in Veenhof 2010b: text 11. The implications of this text are also noted in Hertel 2015: 29-30.

firm address within the Assyrian kinship structure (a house). Because Ennānāt-Aššur lacked such an address and the social and material capital that it represented, he was the object of distrust despite his otherwise sound appearance. To be a member of the metaphorical Assyrian family in good standing required ongoing engagement with the Assyrian kinship structure, not merely a onetime connection. This logic represents two layers of alienation: kinship and engagement. Neither kinship nor engagement was readily accessible to outsiders, but both were within reach of Assyrians outside of Aššur. One could therefore be an Assyrian without ever having set foot in Aššur, while a foreign merchant living in Aššur could not easily become Assyrian – if at all.[313]

Foreigners were not the only people excluded from the Assyrian social category. It was possible to be born in Aššur and to live one's whole life there without ever being counted as an Assyrian. A substantial proportion of the population of Aššur was unfree. Although we cannot establish precise numbers, the ubiquity of slaves in the Old Assyrian texts and the quantities in which they appear all suggest that the servile population in Aššur outnumbered the population of free Assyrians.[314] Slavery is endemic in the Old Assyrian evidence.[315] Slaves feature as an

[313] This is compounded by the patrilineal and patriarchal character of Assyrian society, as well as that of surrounding societies. Foreign merchants (invariably male) in Aššur might have married Assyrian women, but this meant that the woman joined the merchant's family structure rather than the reverse, so that this would have done little to advance the merchant's prospects of "Assyrianizing".

[314] The analogy of the classical Athens suggests the same conclusion, and it was, like Old Assyrian Aššur, a city-state. For an exploration of the demographic balance between free and unfree populations in classical Greece, see Scheidel 2007: 44-45.

[315] For ancient Near Eastern slavery in general, see Westbrook 1995. For two recent studies of slavery in the Old Assyrian period, see Larsen 2017 and de Ridder 2017. See also Veenhof 2008c: 110-111. There are three Old

omnipresent element in the social background of our texts, as unremarkable in their social environment as furniture in a house. Slaves are frequently bought and sold,[316] they are pledged as surety, and they are inherited, just like other property. The extent to which they are treated as commodities is apparent in volume *Ṣ* of the Chicago Assyrian Dictionary, published in 1962. There, the Old Assyrian term *subrum* appears as *ṣupru* B and is defined as "a domestic animal."[317] This is not incorrect. Subsequent text publications have, however, demonstrated that the *subrum* is not a domestic animal like a goat or a cow, but a human slave.[318] The *subrum* is the lowest rung in the Assyrian social ladder. These people are almost without exception unindividuated in our sources, appearing without personal names in a way that fosters the impression that they were not human. Such an impression proceeds quite naturally from texts like the following memorandum describing the items being delivered to three Assyrians: 1 ½ *manā kaspam ṣarrupam* 3 ⅙ *šiqil ḫurāṣam ša abnīšu kunukkīya* 20 *immerī* 1 *alpam u* 1 *subram mimma annîm Šalim-bēlī u Ewarimuša iraddiākunūti* (1 ½ mina of refined silver, 3 ⅙ sheqels of

Assyrian terms for slaves: *wardum* (or *amtum* for a female slave), the more colloquial *ṣuḫārum*, and *subrum*. See Larsen 2017: 292-295 and de Ridder 2017: 49-50 for a broader consideration of the semantic ambiguity of the term *wardum*, Larsen 2017: 289-292 and de Ridder 2017: 52-54 on the term *subrum*, and Larsen 2017: 295-298 and de Ridder 2017: 54-55 on the term *ṣuḫārum*. See Kienast 1984: 89-100, Exkurs 2 and 3 for a no longer fully current overview of attestations of the terms *wardum* and *amtum* in Old Assyrian texts.

[316] See van Koppen 2004: 16 for evidence of Assyrian involvement in supplying slaves to the urban centers in southern Mesopotamia.

[317] See pages 253-254 in CAD: *Ṣ*. Larsen 2015: 215 comments on this at length. See also Hirsch 1966: 55: "Nach all dem sucht man also die Bedeutung des Wortes ZU-BA-*ru-um* in dem weiteren Bereich des zur Aufzucht von Rindern Notwendigen" (After all that, therefore, one seeks the meaning of the word [*subrum*] in the broader semantic field of the necessary for rearing cattle). Dercksen 1996: 231 considers equating the *subrum* with a donkey, and de Ridder 2017 maintains that in some contexts "slave" does not seem a good fit for *subrum*, in which case words with similar syllabic spellings ought to be preferred.

[318] This argument is already made in Lewy and Lewy 1967.

gold dust under my seal, 20 sheep, one ox, and one slave – all of this Šalim-bēlī and Ewarimuša are leading to you).[319] For the purposes of this transfer of property, there is no functional difference between a slave and an ox. It is, moreover, likely that the goods here are listed in descending order of value, so that the slave is the least financially consequential item of the lot.[320] A transactional approach to slaves permeates the Old Assyrian evidence. In one text concerning the division of a father's estate between two brothers, one son stakes his claim to a house in Kanesh and all that pertains to it: *ina šīmātim ša abīni bētam ša Kaniš subrum u uṭuptum yā'um… amtī ina bētīka lā wašbat ṭurdaššī* (According to our father's will, the house in Kanesh, the slaves, and the household goods are mine… my female slave will not stay in your house, send her here!).[321] Again, slaves appear to be as much a part of the house as the furniture, and are written about no differently than the material goods. Most evocative of the degraded status of slaves,[322] however, is a throwaway reference by an Assyrian who wishes to communicate his immiseration in the strongest terms. He says, *ḫulāpī kīma subrī ḫallulāku* (I am wrapped in rags like the slaves!).[323]

The scale of slavery is indicated in still other texts. Listed among the property left behind when the Assyrian woman Lamassutum passes away are *ḫamšat wardū u ḫamiš amātum* (five

[319] Kt 94/k 788: 4-10 In Larsen 2013: text 336.
[320] I thank Martin Worthington for noticing this and bringing it to my attention.
[321] Hecker, Kryszat, and Matouš 1998: text I 705: 1-5 and 24-26.
[322] See Patterson 1982 for the notion of slavery as "social death" with examples of the status of slaves across societies.
[323] S. Smith 1927: 45b: 31-32.

male slaves and five female slaves).[324] Although Lamassutum was a wealthy woman, there is nothing to suggest that her ownership of ten slaves was otherwise extraordinary. In another letter, a woman writes to her sister in Aššur asking her to send along a slave-girl to weave garments for her because, she reports laconically, her servile women happen to have died: *ṣuḫārātuya imtūtā amtam išteat išpartam ša mimma šūbilim* (my servile women have died; send me [just] one slave-girl, a weaver of any sort).[325] This letter reads as though the sending of a slave girl were the most ordinary thing in the world, and not a particularly onerous imposition on the resources of the sender. Still another brief letter refers casually to three servile individuals in just a few lines, namely a washerman, a female slave, and a male slave.[326] In the market, slaves could be purchased in bulk, as in one memorandum recording the sale of twelve individuals in a single transaction.[327] Acquiring slaves was no prohibitive financial burden for many Assyrians, either. Relative to the cost of other goods, slave prices often appear to have been very low – at least in Kanesh, the source of our evidence.[328] There is nevertheless significant price variation, probably related to the personal attributes of slaves and to market volatility stemming from the periodic contraction and expansion of the slave supply. The division of slaves into different categories is apparent in the different terms that could be used

[324] Kt 91/k 421: 23 in Veenhof 2017a: text 164.
[325] Dalley, Walker, and Hawkins 1976: text 122: 21-24. The original text is from Tell al-Rimah and has *antam* rather than *amtam*.
[326] Gelb 1935: text 6, p. 27.
[327] Veenhof and Klengel-Brandt 1992: text 132
[328] For a consideration of slave prices, see Larsen 2017: 291-292 and de Ridder 2017: 53.

to describe them, particularly *subrum* and *wardum*/*amtum*. These categories might in some instances refer to a distinction in status, reflected in the invariably higher prices of *wardum*s or in the fact that the names of *wardum*s are recorded more frequently.[329] Occasionally, *wardum*s appear to have been assigned significant responsibilities for their masters' affairs, suggesting widely different fates for different slaves.[330] *Subrum*s, by contrast, never feature as anything but unskilled slaves of little innate value, and are certainly not entrusted with responsibilities of any great consequence. It is possible that *subrum*s were generally chattel slaves, born into slavery or enslaved in warfare, while *wardum*s might more properly be associated with loss of freedom through debt and the prospect of emancipation. The further division of unfree people according to personal attributes is apparent in a list of individuals belonging to Assyrians in the upper Mesopotamian city of Tell Leilan. The text records 22 individuals, qualifying them in relation to their sex and their age, before summarizing *napḫar* 22 *zikarū u sinnišātu ša bēt warad Aššur ana qāt Mannu-balti-An paqdū* (altogether 22 males and females of the house of the servant of Aššur entrusted to Mannu-balti-An).[331] From the perspective of the slaveowner, this text includes all the relevant information about the people it describes. What matters is the age and sex of the slaves – no more, and no less.

[329] Larsen 2017: 292 observes that the prices of *wardum*s are always higher than the prices of *subrum*s.
[330] This inference is complicated by the ambiguity of the term *wardum*, which can also designate a social inferior rather than a slave. Some or all of these responsible slaves might not be slaves at all.
[331] Vincente 1991: text 168: 8-11 on pages 429-430. Mannu-balti-An was a local official; see Eidem 2008: 330 for the argument that the sign combination *bēt* ÌR Aššur represents not the name Warad-Aššur, but rather an institution in the city, namely the house of the servant of Aššur, the Assyrian community's official representation there.

If slaves could be differentiated according to status and personal attributes, there appears to have been no sustained interest in differentiating them on the basis of origins.[332] Most named slaves in our records appear to have non-Assyrian pedigrees, but an appreciable minority bear Assyrian names.[333] Poverty and debt could and did force Assyrians into indentured servitude and slavery.[334] As the subjects of their masters, such persons lost whatever place they may have had in the kinship hierarchy. They could not and did not partake in the civic life of the *ālum*. To be one of the *ṣaḫḫurūtum* (small ones) in the assembly, you had at the very least to be free.[335] Despite their Assyrian origins, individuals who lapsed into unfreedom lost their ability to function as Assyrians – and their unfreedom became their overriding status.[336] Unfree Assyrians were erstwhile Assyrians. The exclusion of unfree Assyrians from the community of Assyrians demonstrates that Assyrianness was by no means simply a product of kinship and enculturation, important as both were. We know, for instance, of other Assyrians who do not conform in every respect to dominant Assyrian cultural practices, and yet do function as proper Assyrians. Because of Aššur's proximity to lands inhabited by

[332] At least not beyond marking their provenance, which might have suggested something about their personal attributes, like linguistic skills. de Ridder 2017: 51 notes that "the geographic or ethnic designation for the origins of a slave is hardly mentioned."
[333] de Ridder 2017: 57-58. The preponderance of non-Assyrians in our texts is largely a product of the fact that our texts are from Anatolia. Slaves are generally sourced from the weakest and most vulnerable populations, and in Anatolia these populations will have been overwhelmingly Anatolian. It is also conceivable that some of the slaves with Assyrian names were given these names by their Assyrian masters, and are not actually of Assyrian extraction.
[334] For indentured servitude, see the *be'ulātum* arrangement discussed in Larsen 2017: 296-298.
[335] See Dercksen 2004: 237-238 on the stratification of Old Assyrian society between free and unfree and between *ṣaḫḫurūtum* and *rabiūtum*.
[336] Larsen 2017: 298-299.

what our texts call Subareans, it is not surprising that numerous Subarean names (identifiable by their distinct Hurrian linguistic elements) are attested in Old Assyrian texts. More surprising, perhaps, is the fact that many of the people who bear these names are otherwise indistinguishable from the rest of the Assyrians in our texts, and one of them was possibly even a *līmum* official in Aššur.[337] This suggests both that close relationships developed between Assyrians and nearby Hurrian speakers, and that some of those who were at least in part linguistically "Subarean" were to all intents and purposes Assyrian. Inclusion in the Assyrian social category was thus not dependent on any imagined linguistic or cultural purity. One could be Assyrian and have a linguistically unorthodox name – and, presumably, have one foot in another cultural realm.

Assyrians were the children of Aššur, that group of people who were coterminous with the city and its eponymous god and who came together in the operation of the *ālum*. For Assyrians, the *ālum* was the collective made manifest. It was their political representative, negotiating on their behalf, making decisions on their behalf, and advancing their collective interests. Assyrianness denoted belonging to this civic community and participation in its social

[337] See Veenhof 2008a: 17-20 for an overview of the evidence of individuals with Subarean names among the Assyrians, including the *līmum* Atal-šarri (*a-tal*/*ri*-LUGAL). The word *atal*/*adal* is a common Hurrian onomastic element with the semantic sense "strong", for which see de Martino and Giorgeri 2008: 16-19 (note analogous names like Atal-šen – "the brother is strong"). Atal-šarri ("the king is strong") was *līmum* in 1796 BCE according to Barjamovic, Hertel, and Larsen 2012: 95, who render the name as Aḫu-šarrī; Dercksen 1996: 163 renders the name Ari-šarri, preferring the reading *ri* to *tal* and thus rendering the Hurrian term *ar-* (to give), for which see de Martino and Giorgeri 2008: 96-102. The name Ari-šarri (or Atal-šarri) is attested syllabically as the name of a seventeenth century ruler of Nineveh in a letter by that individual to his counterpart in Tigunānum, for which see George et al 2017: 98-99 (Lambert Folios 7635-36: 2).

structures and political institutions. In this enterprise, all Assyrians were brothers, engendering a solidarity capable of sustaining collective action. As the Assyrian treaties with foreign entities make clear, every child of Aššur was to be afforded extraterritorial rights and security on the basis of their Assyrian status; those without such status merited no such privileges and protections. The importance of this distinction is apparent in a letter from an Assyrian ruler to his counterpart in Tigunānum. The Assyrian ruler writes: *aššа Nimaya ša wardī ša ana ālim Aššur ugallilu Nimaya ana mātātīka nadin ul mer Aššur šū* (concerning Nimaya, who is my servant who transgressed against the city of Aššur, Nimaya has been handed over to your lands. He is not a son of Aššur).[338] The Assyrian ruler absolves himself of responsibility for his servant Nimaya, stating that he transgressed against Aššur and, more importantly, that he is not "a son of Aššur". It is because Nimaya is not Assyrian that it is possible to extradite him without further ado. It is conceivable that Nimaya is stripped of his Assyrian status on account of his transgression, though this reading is implies a mechanism for de-Assyrianizing somebody as a punitive measure that is otherwise unattested. Had Nimaya been Assyrian, the letter implies, his extradition would have been much more complicated, and perhaps impossible. Assyrians are brothers, and you don't extradite your brother.

3.3.2 Assyrians Abroad

[338] George et al 2017: 99 (Lambert Folios 7637, 8202: 34-38).

Institutionally, Assyrians in the mercantile diaspora were a subordinate extension of the *ālum*. Unlike in Aššur, Assyrians abroad constituted a small minority in a sea of outsiders. Combined with sheer distance from Aššur, this fact exerted pressures on the form and function of the Assyrian social category that did not exist in the *ālum*. Extended residence alongside non-Assyrians set in motion processes of acculturation that challenged the boundaries of Assyrianness. Simultaneously, however, the terms of the Assyrian presence in Anatolia worked to solidify these boundaries. The need to protect the boundaries of Assyrianness are manifest first and foremost in the principle of Assyrian autonomy, whereby Assyrian communities constituted self-governing islands in an otherwise alien landscape. These islands were linked to each other by the constant flow of people, capital, goods, and texts. They were also organized hierarchically, with a center in Kanesh through which contact with Aššur was channeled. Although there were Assyrians who spent their whole lives in Anatolia, many undertook repeated journeys between Aššur and the merchant diaspora. Such journeys were the indispensable foundation of Assyrian life in Anatolia, which depended on the flow of tin and textiles from Aššur that were then distributed throughout the Anatolian peninsula.[339] Some merchants who spent significant time in Anatolia went on to serve as *līmum*s in the *ālum*, and occasionally returned to Kanesh afterwards.[340] An individual named Innāya son of Amurāya, for example, is attested as having been in Kanesh years before his appointment as *līmum* in Aššur

[339] As noted by Larsen and Lassen 2014: 174.
[340] For an overview of these individuals, see Dercksen 2004: 58-59.

in 1870 BCE; he subsequently served three times as week eponym in Kanesh.[341] The movement of officials between Aššur and Anatolia is demonstrative of the closeness of the ties that Assyrians maintained between their expatriate islands and their ancestral city. Assyrians moved freely between their communal centers and participated in collective governance at every node in their network. Wherever they went, they reproduced their key institution – the assembly – and their symbols, notably in the form of the worship of Aššur.

These distinguishing characteristics were supplemented by others that set Assyrians apart from non-Assyrians. A key distinction is the use by Assyrians in Anatolia of their own Assyrian dialect of Akkadian, along with its own script. None of the contemporary Anatolian languages was related to the language of Aššur, helping to mark out Assyrians linguistically.[342] It is, moreover, the Old Assyrian merchants themselves who are generally credited with the introduction of writing into Anatolia.[343] Anatolian society in the Old Assyrian period was largely nonliterate, so that the very act of writing served to differentiate Assyrians from others, at least initially. Another marker of Assyrianness was the persistence of Assyrian onomastic practices. Assyrian names tend to be linguistically and compositionally distinct from those of Anatolians,

[341] For Innāya, see Dercksen 2004: 59 and 239.
[342] For a reconstruction of the linguistic landscape of Anatolia in the Old Assyrian period, see Goedegebuure 2008.
[343] See Hawkins 1986 for an overview of the early history of writing in Anatolia, and page 363 for the presumed introduction of literacy in the peninsula by Old Assyrian merchants.

often including the exclusively Assyrian element "Aššur".[344] To the extent that they can be reconstructed, Assyrian sartorial practices suggest still further axes of social separation.[345]

A concern with social categories suffuses the Old Assyrian text corpus. The Assyrian term for Anatolians is *nuwā'um*.[346] This term appears to be used as a catch-all descriptor for non-Assyrian Anatolians, with no regard for local differences of any kind. It is also frequently used in lieu of a personal name. Whereas Assyrians are always individuated by name in our texts, Anatolians are often referred to merely as *nuwā'um*s without a name. This is the case even when it is clear that the name of the relevant *nuwā'um* was known to those who wrote the text. A typical example is a note recording various financial exchanges between two individuals. Many of these transactions involve third parties, who are invariably named. There is one exception: the author states that he took a loan *ina bēt nuwā'im* (in the house of a *nuwā'um*).[347] The names of third parties are important, it seems, when they are those of Assyrians, but not when they are those of Anatolians. In another example, a divorce settlement records the names of all actors and witnesses, but when it comes to the silver *ša ana nuwā'im išqulu* (that [the husband] paid to the Anatolian), we are again presented with a general category instead of an individual name. This principle extends to the rare occasions when a

[344] See Eidem 2004 on Old Assyrian names.
[345] Although little evidence of particularly Assyrian fashion or material culture has been documented, there are some tantalizing markers of difference beyond the Assyrian texts themselves. One such marker is the use of the *tudittum* pin by Assyrians of Anatolia, for which see Highcock in preparation**.** See also Stein 2008: 34-35.
[346] See Edzard 1989 for a discussion of the term *nuwā'um*.
[347] George et al 2017: text 30: 10, on page 52.

term other than *nuwā'um* is used to describe a non-Assyrian. One text refers to a person from the town of Mamma, home to an Assyrian *wabartum* and located in the southeastern corner of Anatolia on a route between Aššur and Kanesh.[348] This person is simply called the Mammean: *umma anākūma ziram ana Mammāyim ḫabullāku ul ziram ul subram šēbilam* (I spoke as follows: I owe the Mammean a *zirum*; send me a *zirum* or a slave).[349] Like so many *nuwā'um*s in other texts, this Mammean is denied a name even as the names of all the other people in the same letter are recorded. But then, they are Assyrian, and the Mammean is not.

The Assyrian habit of referring to non-Assyrians as generic representatives of their social category rather than as individuals with names is symptomatic of their exclusionary approach to outsiders. Nevertheless, life among non-Assyrians produced extensive interaction across category boundaries.[350] This is evident in the many business dealings at all levels between Assyrians and non-Assyrians. Trade with Anatolians was, after all, the economic basis of the Assyrian presence there. One interesting feature of sale contracts in Kanesh is that they differ depending on the contracting parties. When sales involve Anatolians, there is greater local influence on the composition of the contracts than when they only involve Assyrians.[351]

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[348] For the location and evidence of Mamma, see Barjamovic 2011: 204-211 and passim.
[349] Kt 92/k 219: 29-32 in Veenhof 2010b: text 22. The meaning of *zirum* is unclear; Veenhof suggests "cauldron".
[350] For studies of such interaction and suggested frameworks for approaching such interactions, see Lumsden 2008 and Stein 2008.
[351] As noted by Kienast 1984: 14-35 and commented upon by Démare-Lafont and Fleming 2015: 59, fn. 61. Démare-Lafont and Fleming 2015: 60 suggest that this convergence of Assyrian and Anatolian practices is attributable to the heightened need for consensual and mutually intelligible arrangements in commercial exchange: "It is precisely in the realm of commercial relationships that common legal rules are most often needed."

Interaction is equally apparent in the adoption by Assyrians of many local practices. Apart from the tens of thousands of texts recovered from Kanesh, direct material evidence of the Old Assyrian community is meager.[352] Assyrians appear to have lived in what were essentially local homes,[353] to have used local pots and dishes,[354] and to have otherwise lived materially like the locals. Some of this is no doubt attributable to the fact that Assyrians made use of local laborers and materials to build their homes and fashion their pots, as well as relying primarily on local slaves to do their menial work. In this sense, the material overlap between Assyrian and non-Assyrian in Kanesh might say more about the elevated social position of Assyrians than about a meaningful borrowing of local practices. There are traces of more significant cultural borrowing. Over time, Assyrian seals in Anatolia combine Assyrian and local representative

[352] Özgüç 1963: 101-102: "Except for the clay tablets, with their cuneiform script and distinctly Mesopotamian cylinder-seal impressions, all the artifacts of these levels are in the native style. If the tablets and their sealed envelopes had not been found, in fact, we might never have suspected the existence of the merchant colony." Cf. Emberling and Yoffee 1999: 277, who point to the Old Assyrian tablets in Kanesh to state that Özgüç "is wrong". Emberling and Yoffee misrepresent Özgüç's argument: while it is true that the tablets are *prima facie* evidence of an Assyrian presence, and that there are further indicators of this presence in the archaeological record, it remains true that – as Özgüç argued – such a presence would have been exceptionally difficult to surmise in the absence of the tablets. Other material evidence of Assyrians in Kültepe is sparse and can only be interpreted as indicative of a strong Old Assyrian presence when regarded in light of the textual evidence. See more recently Larsen and Lassen 2014: 172-173: "In terms of material culture, however, [Kültepe] appears as typically Anatolian. The architecture is in the local tradition, with extensive use of half-timber constructions, and the ceramics discovered on the floors and in graves are clearly of local type; indeed, it has become commonplace to say that without the texts and the associated cylinder seals it would have been impossible to determine the true nature of the site — it would have been seen simply as an Anatolian town. Undoubtedly, more precise and detailed excavation techniques will lead to an adjustment of this view, but it seems clear that the Assyrian visitors did adopt vital elements of material culture from the local community."

[353] The purchase of a home by Assyrians from a *nuwā'um* is documented in Kt 91/k 522, for which see Veenhof 2003c: 693-695.

[354] Stein 2008: 34-35 notes that material items that were difficult to transport but easy to procure or produce in Anatolia would not have been brought over from Aššur; the use of local ceramics is therefore to be expected.

traditions, demonstrating active adaptation of Anatolian styles in some of the most personal objects Assyrians could own.[355] To be able to conduct their business, Assyrians in Anatolia needed to learn local languages. Although there is little direct evidence that they did so, it is clear from the lack of references to interpreters and the fluency of communication between Assyrians and local interlocutors that there were rarely any substantial linguistic barriers.[356] More concretely, linguistic integration is apparent in the occurrence of numerous Anatolian loanwords in the Old Assyrian texts.[357] Assyrians knew, adopted, and used terms from local languages. Perhaps the most vivid example of Assyrian integration with local society comes from a letter that refers to an Assyrian by name of Kazuwa – incidentally, not a traditional Assyrian name – who was heading toward the north Anatolian town Kuburnat.[358] The letter says the following of Kazuwa: *awīlum ana ekallim ṭāḫi nuwā'ūtamma ētanappaš* (The man is close to the palace. He constantly acts like a *nuwā'um*).[359] This passage has two important implications. First, it was possible for Assyrians to build close relationships with locals and to act like them – whatever that meant. And second, this was not regarded as a good thing. The rest of the letter makes clear that Kazuwa's closeness with the palace of the local potentate and his

[355] See Lassen 2014 for the Old Assyrian glyptic evidence and the hybridization of Anatolian and Assyrian designs.
[356] See Starke 1993: 36-37 on interpreters in the texts from Kanesh, with previous bibliography.
[357] On Anatolian Loanwords in Akkadian Texts from Kültepe, see Dercksen 2007.
[358] For evidence of Kuburnat, see Barjamovic 2011: 267-270 and passim.
[359]Thureau-Dangin 1928: text 27: 14. In her edition of the text Michel 1991: 37-38 translates: "il agit toujours dans l'intérêt des indigènes" (he always acts in the interest of the natives). The text is discussed in Larsen and Lassen 2014: 177 and Larsen 2015: 249, as well as in the *Chicago Assyrian Dictionary* N/1: 256, where the sign sequence *nu-wa-ú-ta-ma* is interpreted unconvincingly as being related to *namûtu*, "joke", rather than to *nuwā'um*.

nuwā'um-esque behaviors were a source of mistrust and anxiety. Indeed, the author of the letter recommends that remedial steps be taken.

In addition to extensive business dealing with locals, the adoption of local material culture, the adaptation of local representative traditions, the learning of local languages, and the possibility of behaving like the locals, Assyrians came together with local Anatolians in marriage. The extended absence of Assyrian men from Aššur was not conducive to the maintenance of traditional family structures. Because of the social importance of the kinship network in Aššur itself, Assyrians contracted appropriate marriages in the city and maintained homes and business relations there. While some Assyrian women accompanied their husbands abroad, most appear to have stayed in Aššur to manage the family home and its affairs and to raise the children in the lap of the *ālum*. The result was that Assyrian men could be effectively separated from their wives for extended periods, sometimes stretching over years. Protracted absence had an obvious impact, as one letter from a wife in Aššur to her husband in Anatolia illustrates: *apputtum kīma ṭuppam tašmû alkamma ēn Aššur ilīka u ili bētīka amur u adi balṭākuni ēnīka lāmur dullum ana libbīni ētarab* (Come here urgently, as soon as you have heard the tablet! See the eye of Aššur, your god and the god of your house! While I still live, let me see your eye! Misery has entered our hearts.)[360]

[360] S. Smith 1925: 25: 22-25.

To deal with some of the complications arising from spousal separation, a solution developed that permitted secondary marriages for Assyrian men. In addition to their primary wives in Aššur, Assyrian men could marry an additional woman in Anatolia.[361] These marriages were predicated on keeping the wives geographically apart – they could not be in the same place – and on maintaining a clear status distinction. The primary wife was called the *aššatum* (wife) and the secondary wife was designated as the *amtum* (slave), or occasionally the *qadištum* (holy woman), even though these women were not slaves. In the earlier stages of Assyrian settlement in Anatolia, secondary wives appear to have been exclusively local.[362] The status of the children of such unions is ambiguous, but it was inferior to that of children born to primary wives in Aššur from the perspective of inheritance rights and social rank.[363] Beyond ensuring the primacy of wives in Aššur and their offspring, there is no indication of any systematic exclusion of the children of *amtum* wives from the Assyrian social category. The patriarchal character of Assyrian society made it relatively simple to integrate these children. If their legitimacy was recognized by their fathers, they were effectively born into the Assyrian kinship structure and had a place within it. They usually bear standard Assyrian names and, where texts allow us to reconstruct their life courses, they tend to participate in the Assyrian mercantile system and to live and work as Assyrians. It is unclear whether the children of

[361] There is an extensive secondary literature on the concept of the Old Assyrian second wife. See in particular Michel 2006, Kienast 2008, Stol 2016: 182-188, and Heffron 2017.
[362] See Heffron 2017: 79-80 for the argument that marrying local women was a conscious strategy for forging relationships with locals and thus for advancing business interests.
[363] Larsen 2015: 250-252.

amtum wives ever went on to live in Aššur itself, or whether there was any residual sense among other Assyrians that they were semi-Assyrian.

Although the system of secondary wives enabled marriages with Anatolian women, there are indications that this was not the preferred outcome for many Assyrians. There is a high incidence of Assyrian men in Anatolia who contract secondary marriages with the daughters of fellow Assyrians. Presumably, these were usually the daughters resulting from the union of Assyrians and their local *amtum* wives. This model is exemplified by a marriage contract between Puzur-Ištar, an Assyrian merchant based in Kanesh, and Ištar-Lamassī, the daughter of the Assyrian Aššur-nādā and his Anatolian *amtum* wife Šišaḫšušar. The contract specifies explicitly that Ištar-Lamassī is to be Puzur-Ištar's *amtum* wife – *ana amtūtim ēḫḫuzma* (he married [her] as an *amtum*-wife).[364] Since marrying other Assyrians eliminated the opportunity of forging relationships with locals through marriage, such unions suggest that there was little innate advantage in marrying Anatolians.[365] In one letter, an Assyrian man in the central Anatolian site of Waḫšušana[366] arranges to marry the daughter of another Assyrian who is likely based in Kanesh. He wants his prospective wife to join him in Waḫšušana (roughly 200 kilometers distant) because he is alone, but threatens that if she does not come he will marry a local woman: *wēdāku mamman ša ina rēšēa izzazzūma paššūram išakkananni lâššu šumma išti*

[364] I 490: 3-4, text 176 in Larsen 2002: 23-234. See Larsen 2002: xxv on Ištar-Lamassī as the daughter of Aššur-nādā and Šišaḫšušar.
[365] Cf. Heffron 2017: 79-80.
[366] For the location and evidence of Waḫšušana, see Barjamovic 2011: 339-350.

ṣuḫārīya lā tallikīm ina Waḫšušana mer'at Waḫšušana aḫḫaz idîma atti u ṣuḫārūya lā tasaḫḫarā atalkānim (I am alone! There is nobody who takes care of me, or sets the table for me. If you don't come with my servants, I will marry a woman from Waḫšušana in Waḫšušana. Take note! You and my servants mustn't delay, come here!).[367] The letter-writer would clearly prefer to marry the daughter of his fellow Assyrian, but appears resigned to making do with a local woman if he must. The implication is that marrying locals was born of necessity rather than choice. In Anatolia, Assyrian marriage choices were a complex product of availability, social relationships, and individual dispositions. Beyond considerations of personal preference and availability, Assyrians likely married above all to cement social and business ties. The closest relationships that Assyrians cultivated were with fellow Assyrians, so we should not be surprised if Assyrians preferred marrying the daughters of fellow Assyrians whenever possible.

The complexity of the marriage situation in Kanesh is exemplified in a marriage contract between Malik-Aššur and Suḫkana, the daughter of Irma-Aššur.[368] Suḫkana's name suggests that her mother was a local *amtum* wife, while her father's name is unambiguously Assyrian, as is that of her new husband. The contract specifies that Malik-Aššur is to take no other wives in Kanesh, regardless of their origin: *ina Kaniš šanītam ulā ēḫḫazma… lū mer'at Aššur lū mer'at mātim ulā ēḫḫaz* (in Kanesh he will not marry another [wife]… whether she is a daughter of

[367] Stephens 1944: text 104: 15-25. For this text, see also J. Lewy 1950: 374, fn. 48, Michel 2006: 170, fn. 55, and Kienast 2008: 43-44.
[368] Kt 94/k 149 in Michel and Garelli 1996b.

Aššur or a daughter of the land, he will not marry [her]).[369] Differentiating the possible origins of wives indicates both that Assyrian and local women could be married in Kanesh, and that there was an important status distinction between them. At the very end of the text, the contract states that Malik-Aššur is already betrothed to a woman in Aššur: *ina ālim Aššur mer'at Dada eḫḫaz* (in *ālum* Aššur he will marry the daughter of Dada).[370] While it is not affirmed elsewhere in the text, this final note makes clear that Suḫkana is herself an *amtum* wife. Malik-Aššur may be prohibited from marrying any other women in Kanesh, but he is committed to taking a wife in Aššur. What we have, then, is an Assyrian man in Kanesh who is betrothed to an Assyrian woman in Aššur. He is nevertheless marrying locally, but choosing to take as a secondary wife the daughter of a local Assyrian rather than an altogether non-Assyrian woman – even though both are theoretically available. One reason for this preference might be the desire to provide a more intimate foundation for the pursuit of common business interests, as Malik-Aššur and his new father-in-law Irma-Aššur are documented conducting business together in other texts.[371] Regardless of the underlying reasons for Malik-Aššur's marriage choices, it is clear that life in Anatolia posed special challenges. To meet these

[369] Kt 94/k 149: 8-10 and 13-15 in Michel and Garelli 1996b

[370] Kt 94/k 149: 21-23 in Michel and Garelli 1996b.

[371] See Stratford 2017: 258-259 for a text that shows two individuals named Irma-Aššur and Aššur-malik engaging in joint business ventures. A similar business relationship is attested in the case of the marriage between Puzur-Ištar and Aššur-nādā's daughter Ištar-Lamassī referred to previously. Puzur-Ištar and Aššur-nādā are shown engaging in business together in TC 3 95, text 6 in Larsen 2002: 10-11, as well is on other texts. Separately, there is a solitary, late text in which an Assyrian merchant suggests to a business partner in Mari that their children get married; here, the commercial dimension is clearly driving the marriage proposal, and it is telling that the Assyrian suggests that his son marry the daughter of the man from Mari rather than the reverse. See A.2881: 33-37 in Durand 2001: 121-122.

challenges, a system developed that allowed for limited marital integration with locals while maintaining the categorical boundaries of Assyrianness and the supremacy of Aššur.

Like their male counterparts, some Assyrian women took local spouses. Such marriages were rare, and usually appear to have taken place only once an Assyrian woman in Anatolia was legally separated from her Assyrian husband.[372] It is also not clear whether any of the women involved in marriages with Anatolian men were themselves from Aššur. It is more likely that the women were of mixed parentage, and that they had usually been secondary wives. Because of the marginal character of these marriages, both in terms of the individuals involved and their personal situation upon marrying, they posed no real threat to the Assyrian social category. The patriarchal character of Assyrian society ensured that the offspring of Assyrian women and Anatolian men were not Assyrian and had no claim to Assyrian property or status. In a typical example, the woman Ištar-Lamassī was married to the Assyrian Kunīlum, with whom she had children. When Kunīlum died, Ištar-Lamassī married an Anatolian man. Her own death resulted in the composition of a series of texts regarding the division of her estate.[373] In these texts, Ištar-Lamassī is frequently referred to as the wife of Kunīlum, despite her subsequent marriage, and her Anatolian husband is almost always referred to simply as the *nuwā'um* rather than by

[372] One exception is the marriage between Tamnanika, the daughter of the Assyrian Šū-bēlim, and the presumably Anatolian Galuwa, son of Agabsi. Tamnanikas's mother was probably a local *amtum* wife. This union is documented in Kt v/k 147a and Kt v/k 147b, for which see Donbaz 2003.
[373] See Veenhof 2008b for a reconstruction of the entire sequence of events.

name.[374] Here as elsewhere, only Assyrians seem to count. Ištar-Lamassī's marriage to an Anatolian does not integrate him into Assyrian society. On the contrary, it serves to alienate Ištar-Lamassī. The act of marrying an Anatolian man was in effect a renunciation of Assyrianness, if not for the woman then certainly for any children from such unions.

The character of the Assyrian presence in Anatolia resulted in a much closer categorical identification with the mercantile profession. To all intents and purposes, Assyrians abroad were *tamkārum*s – merchants. While some Assyrians engaged in other work,[375] the Assyrian communities outside of Aššur existed by virtue of their mercantile activities. The resulting categorical conflation is manifest in numerous texts, where the word *tamkārum* functions as a synonym for Assyrian. A divorce agreement between an Assyrian man and his presumably Anatolian wife Šakriušwa states that *Šakriušwa lū ana nuwā'im lū ana tamkārim ašar libbīša tallak* (Šakriušwa may marry whoever she pleases, be he a *nuwā'um* or a merchant).[376] Being a merchant is so closely identified with Assyrianness as to serve as a synonym for the category. The same conflation is evident in the surviving treaty between the Assyrians and the ruler of Kanesh. In that text, one provision demands of the local potentate that *ana bēt tamkārim almattim mer Kaniš u ḫapiram lā tuššuruni* (you will not permit a Kaneshite or a vagrant to

[374] As noted by Veenhof 2008b: 105-106; it is also noteworthy that Ištar-Lamassī was the *aššatum* wife rather than the *amtum* wife. Kt 91/k 369 identifies the Anatolian husband by name. He is called Lulu. See also Kryszat 2007: 213 for VS XXVI 33: 10, a text that likewise refers to a woman's Anatolian husband simply as the *nuwā'um*.
[375] See Michel 2015a for an overview of professions other than trade engaged in by Assyrians (and others in their ambit); see also Sturm 2001 for a study of an Assyrian smith who worked in Kanesh.
[376] Kt n/k 1414: 7-9 in Sever 1992.

enter the house of a merchant or a widow).[377] "Merchant" again stands in for "Assyrian". It is interesting that widows are listed as a separate category. This exclusion appears to imply that a widow who maintains her own household outside of the established patriarchal Assyrian system of houses does not count as an ordinary Assyrian and therefore requires special protections. If this is the case, then an Assyrian woman who marries an Anatolian would indeed be distancing herself from any categorical protections associated with Assyrianness.

The strength of the Assyrian association with the mercantile profession is a product of the peculiar structure of Assyrian life outside of Aššur. Assyrians were organized as a community of merchants with special rights to free movement and protection. These privileges and protections were entirely dependent on categorical belonging. Assyrian status was, therefore, imperative. To protect their status and privileges, Assyrians had to ward off anyone who would impinge on their mercantile monopoly. The result was an attitude of pronounced hostility to any outsiders who threatened their position as Assyrians. Precisely such an attitude is manifest in a provision from a draft treaty regulating the terms of the Assyrian presence abroad. A special clause in this treaty concerns members of the Akkadian social category: *akkidî lā tušellânni šumma ana mātīka ettiqūnim lū taddunūniāti lū nidukku* (you will not permit Akkadians to come up here; if they cross over into your country you will give them to us and we will kill [them]).[378] Competition from members of other social categories was intolerable, and

[377] Kt 00/k 6: 61-63 in Günbattı 2004.
[378] Kt n/k 974: 11-15 in Çeçen and Hecker 1995

Assyrians were prepared to kill to preserve their monopoly. This same attitude is evident in the imposition of the death penalty on violators of the *ālum*'s golden rule – the prohibition against giving gold to any Akkadian, Amorite, or Subarean.[379] Less formally but more pervasively, Assyrian insulation from outsiders was enforced through their everyday exclusion of *nuwā'um*s.

Category boundaries were not only protected by heightened hostility to outsiders, but also by heightened intragroup solidarity and cohesion. There is a great deal of evidence suggesting that Assyrians abroad regularly worked to help each other against outsiders. A poorly preserved letter from the *wabartum* of Mamma to the *wabartum* of Kuššara records the payment of a ransom for an Assyrian taken into custody by the local authorities. The letter also notes that the seizure of Assyrians is a recurring problem: *ištēt ṣubātum ana ipṭeri ša Kurara mer Aššur-malik nuwā'um irdiaššūma niddin… nuwā'ū uštenišūnīma kaspum ana paṭṭurīšunu lâššu* (we paid one textile for the ransom price of Kurara the son of Aššur-malik, so a *nuwā'um* led him here… the *nuwā'um*s keep on bringing out [captives] and there is no silver for their ransom).[380] This is a problem affecting Assyrians qua Assyrians, and thus merits a common solution. The letter conveys that the *ālum* decreed a temporary elimination of a tax on Assyrians so that the proceeds could instead be used to redeem the captives.[381] As such, the letter communicates both that there was a problem affecting Assyrians and that remedial

[379] Kt 79/k 101 in Sever 1990: 260-262.
[380] For an edition of this text, see Barjamovic 2011: 124, fn. 379.
[381] For a more detailed discussion of this reading, see Veenhof 2010b: 85-86.

action was taken by the *ālum* to help fellow Assyrians in distress. It is not just the *ālum* that works to help fellow Assyrians. As a body, *kārum* Kanesh intercedes with the local ruler to secure the release of Aššur-taklāku, who is accused of cooperating with enemies of Kanesh; the rulers of Kanesh are said to refer to Aššur-taklāku as *aḫūkunu* – your brother.[382] There are other cases of Assyrians coming to each other's aid at the level of the individual. In a separate ransom situation, an Assyrian by name of Anina is seized by a *nuwā'um* for unpaid debt. He is redeemed by a fellow Assyrian, the act being described as a liberation: *Anina ištu bēt nuwā'êm ušeṣiaššu* (he has brought Anina out from the house of the *nuwā'um*).[383] Although Anina is now indebted to the Assyrian who redeemed him, he is no longer the captive of *nuwā'um*s – he is free to work toward his rehabilitation among Assyrians. The expectation that common Assyrianness is sufficient cause for mutual aid is the basis of an appeal for help by still another captive Assyrian. Nūr-Ištar writes pleadingly to his fellow Assyrian Šū-bēlim:

> *aḫī atta bēlī atta lā nakrāku lā aḫīāku šīrka u damka anāku mētam yāti u mērī ina kiširšim teṭṭirniāti umma attāma ana awīlēma eṭlum aḫī lā nakar lā aḫī*
>
> You are my brother, you are my lord! I am not an alien, I am not a stranger! I am your flesh and your blood. You will save us from prison – me, a dead man, and my son! Thus

[382] See Kt 93/k 145 in Michel and Garelli 1996: 277-280. See line 18 for *aḫūkunu*.
[383] Gelb 1935: text 12: 11-13, p. 32.

you will say to the men (who are keeping us captive): "the fellow is my brother! He is no alien, he is no stranger!"

We have no evidence that Nūr-Ištar and Šū-bēlim are, in fact, brothers. The letter introduces only Nūr-Ištar with his patronymic, indicating that the two men did not have the same father. Nūr-Ištar's language of brotherhood is also consistent with the Assyrian notion that all Assyrians are brothers. In this light, Nūr-Ištar's entreaty should be read as figurative. He is appealing to Šū-bēlim on the basis of common Assyrian status. Because both men are Assyrian, they are neither aliens nor strangers to each other, but brothers – flesh and blood. Nūr-Ištar's claim to categorical solidarity may be heightened by his distress and a personal background between the two men that is unknown to us, but the rhetorical premise stands: as an Assyrian, Nūr-Ištar believed he could appeal to his fellow Assyrian to come to his aid simply because they shared their Assyrianness. He believed, moreover, that if Šū-bēlim as a third party were to vouch for his Assyrian status (and grease his captors with some bribes, as he subsequently instructs Šū-bēlim to do), his jailors would be inclined to release him.

Assyrians abroad guarded their category boundaries jealously from all outsiders. After all, they owed their exalted social position precisely to their categorical belonging. Even as Assyrians acculturated and intermarried with the Anatolians among whom they lived, they maintained their social distance. They were not and could not afford to become *nuwā'um*s, and they had to resist encroachment from external competitors. Assyrianness was inseparable from

the freedom to trade and from access to distant Aššur, the entrepot for the tin and textiles that were shipped to Anatolia and the source of the capital that funded mercantile expeditions. The result was a cohesive social category that replicated itself across space. It was also a social category based in economic specialization – hence the identity of Assyrians and merchants – as much as on the various cultural and status indicators that marked Assyrians as different. Relative to the bulk of the local population, Assyrians were a materially and socially privileged group, which informs some of the haughtiness in their approach to *nuwā'um*s. They occupied their own niche in the social space, enjoying unparalleled freedom from local potentates. To be an Assyrian abroad was to be part of a mobile community that acted together to further its own collective interests and set itself apart from outsiders.

3.4 An End, a Middle, and a Beginning

3.4.1 The Caesura of Šamšī-Adad

Old Assyrian life was rooted in the supremacy of the *ālum* as the corporate embodiment of the Assyrian social category. The *ālum*'s supremacy was upended in 1808 BCE.[384] In that year, a man by name of Šamšī-Adad marched into Aššur, dispensed with the Assyrian ruler, and integrated the city into his kingdom. Šamšī-Adad was a potentate who had for many years been building a territorial kingdom in northern Mesopotamia. Aššur's place within this kingdom is the

[384] As per the chronological scheme of Barjamovic, Hertel, and Larsen 2012: 91.

subject of some debate, but it unquestionably lost its independence and its freedom to act without the oversight and approval of its new overlord.[385] Although Šamšī-Adad did not rule his kingdom from Aššur or establish it as one of his two secondary capitals,[386] he did take over as the city's titular ruler. Numerous inscriptions dating to Šamšī-Adad's reign have been unearthed in Aššur.[387] In these inscriptions, Šamšī-Adad styles himself as *iššak* Aššur, the viceroy of Aššur, in the tradition of Assyrian rulers. Yet this is neither his only nor his primary title. Far more grandiosely, and in a manner that is entirely at odds with established Assyrian norms, Šamšī-Adad styles himself *šar kiššatim* (king of totality).[388] Here is a man who has no qualms about asserting his own supremacy by adopting the royal title, or about reaching still further to claim universal hegemony. This was no Assyrian king.

What space was there for Aššur in this brave new world? A closer analysis of Šamšī-Adad's inscriptions suggests a tension between the preservation of the established order and the imposition of Šamšī-Adad's regime. There is continuity in Šamšī-Adad's adoption of the traditional title *iššak* Aššur. Šamšī-Adad also engages in substantial construction in Aššur, calling himself *bāni bīt aššur* (builder of the Aššur temple),[389] and he refers repeatedly to Aššur as his

[385] See Charpin 2004 for an overview of evidence of Aššur under Šamšī-Adad, and Ziegler 2011 for an overview of developments in the broader region of Aššur in the same period.
[386] Šamšī-Adad ruled from Šubat-Enlil, and his sons ruled parts of their father's kingdom from Mari and Ekallātum.
[387] For Šamšī-Adad's inscriptions, including those found outside of Aššur, see Grayson 1987: A.0.39.
[388] See for instance Grayson 1987: A.0.39.1: 2: LUGAL KIŠ.
[389] For this title, see Grayson 1987: A.0.39.1: 3-4.

city – *ālīya aššur* (my city Aššur).[390] In some of the correspondence from Mari, including a letter written by Šamšī-Adad himself, Aššur is still called the *ālum*, without need of further specification.[391] Scratch the surface, however, and the apparent continuity quickly reveals itself to be little more than a veneer.[392] Šamšī-Adad's inscriptions are not written in the Assyrian dialect or in the Old Assyrian script.[393] Even in his inscriptions from Aššur, Šamšī-Adad is first and foremost a king. Secondarily, he is *šakin Enlil* (the appointee of the god Enlil) rather than *iššak* Aššur.[394] Of Šamšī-Adad's 19 attested epithets, only three relate to Aššur.[395] In Aššur itself, Šamšī-Adad's temple construction is likewise not quite consistent with tradition. One of the inscriptions that styles Šamšī-Adad as the builder of the Aššur temple subsequently describes this temple as the temple of Enlil.[396] Indeed, Šamšī-Adad privileged his relationship with the god Enlil, after whom he named his new capital and who almost always occupies the first position in lists of titles describing the king's relationships with gods.[397] It is possible that there is an

[390] In just one inscription, Šamšī-Adad refers five times to *ālīya aššur* (my city Aššur). See Grayson 1987: A.0.39.1: 35-36, 56-57, 62-63, 70-71, and 78-79.
[391] Ziegler 2002: 213-217.
[392] As Kupper 1985: 151 concludes, "Šamši-Adad, usurpateur du trône d'Assur, ne nous apparaît pas comme un monarque assyrien… le règne de Šamši-Adad est à considérer comme une parenthèse dans l'histoire de l'Assyrie."
[393] On this point see Grayson 1985: 11, Galter 2002-05: 6, and Pongratz-Leisten 1997: 95, who also observes that Šamšī-Adad's personal correspondence is likewise not Assyrian in dialect or orthography.
[394] As per Grayson 1987: A.0.39.2: i 4.
[395] See Charpin 1984: 52 for a table compiling the various titles adopted by Šamšī-Adad in his inscriptions.
[396] Grayson 1987: A.0.39.1: 18. We know the same temple is meant because most exemplars of the inscription were recovered from the remains of the Aššur temple, and, more importantly, because the inscription itself describes this Enlil temple as the one which the Old Assyrian ruler Erišum had built. Erišum, of course, states that he built a temple to Aššur, not Enlil, for which see A.0.33.2 and passim.
[397] As can be seen in the table in Charpin 1984: 52. Šamšī-Adad made Šeḫna his capital and renamed it Šubat-Enlil, the seat of Enlil.

attempt to syncretize the peculiar Assyrian god with Enlil as head of the Mesopotamian pantheon. Any such syncretism is clearly underdeveloped given the separate appearance of both deities in many of Šamšī-Adad's inscriptions. Another possibility is that both Aššur and Enlil were housed in the reconstructed Aššur/Enlil temple, albeit in separate cellas.[398] Regardless of the reasons for Aššur's repositioning as secondary to Enlil, or his reinterpretation as a manifestation of Enlil, from the point of view of Assyrian tradition this divine realignment was a radical act. Throughout the Old Assyrian text corpus, the primacy of Aššur is self-evident and unchallenged. Other gods exist, but Aššur is the god of the Assyrians, the divine avatar of the Assyrian community. Equating Aššur with Enlil is a universalizing act that works to alienate the god from his people, eroding his identification with a single community. Equally, placing Aššur in a position of inferiority to Enlil is a symbolic subjection of the *ālum* to a higher power. Pursuing either or both of these theological agendas in the pulsating heart of the worship of Aššur – the Aššur temple in Aššur – had profound implications. Such agendas are nevertheless apparent in the meticulous distinction between Aššur as god and Aššur as place that characterizes Šamšī-Adad's inscriptions. In these texts, the term "Aššur" is always qualified by an appropriate determinative sign, and the choice of sign is contextually consistent. There is no longer any confusion between the god and the place, nor any insinuation that the community

[398] As is suggested by Miglus 1990, who argues that the temple's plan would allow this. Miglus 2001 observes that the architectural plan of Šamšī-Adad's Aššur temple is wholly consistent with broader Mesopotamian norms for temple construction at the time, which might present still further evidence of the 'Babylonization' of Assyrian religious tradition.

of Aššur is the god Aššur.[399] In Šamšī-Adad's kingdom, there is a geographical place called Aššur and there is an eponymous god, and never the twain shall meet.

For all that there was dramatic change at the top, much of the Assyrian social order persisted. There is not enough evidence to speak to the depth of political restructuring in Aššur, but there is substantial continuity. The Assyrian ruler was replaced by the new king and his agents, who formed a separate political network that stood above Assyrian institutions. This network had the power to interfere in Assyrian affairs and to dictate policy as it saw fit. Everyday management of Aššur and its trade, however, remained in the hands of Assyrians. The sequence of *līmum* officials was unbroken and far outlived Šamšī-Adad. Likewise, the *ālum* continued to function as an assembly, at least in its narrow incarnation as a small council of leading Assyrians. This is indicated by a letter written by the *šēbūtum ša ālim aššur* (the elders of *ālum* Aššur) in the immediate aftermath of Šamšī-Adad's death.[400] Šamšī-Adad's conquest of Aššur did not uproot the Assyrian merchant network or the economic logic that sustained it. Although there is a dramatic reduction in the number of dated texts from Kanesh beginning in the second half of the 19th century, it predates Šamšī-Adad's conquest by about three decades. Whatever the causes of the reduced number of texts in Anatolia, Assyrian involvement in trade

[399] This insinuation follows from the absence of the geographic determinative in the inscriptions of Old Assyrian rulers after Erišum I, so that Aššur was always explicitly divine or implicitly so.
[400] Kt 01/k 217 in Günbattı 2014: 88-91. See Dercksen 2015 for the reconstruction *šé-bu-tum*; cf. Günbattı 2014's reconstruction *ší-ip-ru*, which would still point to the persistence of the *ālum* as a political body capable of commissioning envoys.

persisted under Aššur's new king. In roughly contemporaneous letters from Mari, Assyrians can still be seen traversing upper Mesopotamia in their merchant caravans. There are letters that refer to an *illatum ša aššurî* (caravan of Assyrians),[401] as well as letters that refer to *tamkārū aššurû* (Assyrian merchants).[402] One letter even speaks of a caravan of 300 *aššurû u* 300 *imērū ittīšunu* (300 Assyrians and 300 donkeys with them), indicating that the scale of Assyrian trade continued to be significant.[403] Interestingly, almost all of these references to Assyrian merchants occur in the context of trouble, describing either the obstruction or expulsion of the merchants. It is possible that this reflects the increasing volatility of the political landscape and the declining ability of the *ālum* to ensure the free movement of Assyrians abroad.[404] Such volatility is evident in the years after Šamšī-Adad's death, when his son Išme-Dagan struggled to retain control over areas of the kingdom that included Aššur. In a letter from that time, an official expresses his fear that Aššur and nearby Ekallātum will be utterly destroyed by an unspecified enemy: *šibūtī zikārī sinnišātim dumugabî ālam ekallātim u aššur inassaḫ u lā watar… ana mīnim bēlī ana ālam ekallātim u aššur aḫšu nadi warki alānē šunūti nasaḫim ul isilti mātim kalîša iptaṭarma ana lemnim itūršu* ([the enemy] will tear out the elders, the men, the

[401] There is an *illatim ša aššurî* (caravan of the Assyrians) in M.7884: 27, text 436 in Charpin, Joannès, Lackenbacher, and Lafont 1988: 341-342. There is also a reference to *awīlē illatam* in A.2451+M.5651: 8 (line 3 leaves no doubt that these men are Assyrian – *aššurî*), text 433 in Charpin, Joannès, Lackenbacher, and Lafont 1988: 334-335.

[402] Assyrian merchants feature as *tamkārī aššurî* in A.4308(+)M.7371: 19', text 316 in Charpin, Joannès, Lackenbacher, and Lafont 1988: 80-81. They feature as *tamkārū aššurû* in A.3038+A.3659: 82, text 315 in Charpin, Joannès, Lackenbacher, and Lafont 1988: 77-79.

[403] M.6084: 3, text 432 in Charpin, Joannès, Lackenbacher, and Lafont 1988: 333-334.

[404] It is also in the nature of these letters to report problems, so that the incidents they describe might be exceptional and unrepresentative of ordinary conditions.

women, and the babies from the cities Ekallātum and Aššur! This is no exaggeration! ... Why is my lord negligent concerning Ekallātum and Aššur? After these cities are uprooted, won't control over the whole land be undone? It will be given over to evil!).[405] While there is no sign that the dreaded destruction ever befell Aššur, it is clear that the city was dragged into the conflicts of its overlords. The *ālum* was no longer able to carve out its own path in the world.[406]

The major institutional change occasioned by Šamšī-Adad's regime was the replacement of the Assyrian ruler with the absent king, who was no longer the agent of the *ālum* but its superior. Without its sovereign status, the *ālum* could not easily conduct its own policy or act effectively on behalf of Assyrians. There were some efforts to compensate for this. A letter from Mari reports the actions of a person with an otherwise unattested title acting in the interests of Aššur: *wakil tamkārī aššur šūrubtam ana Aškur-Adad ušērib u aššur kalûšu ina Karanāma uštallaṭ* (the overseer of the merchants of Aššur delivered a contribution to Aškur-Adad and all of Aššur has secured control over Karanā).[407] The new office of *wakil tamkārī Aššur* (overseer of the merchants of Aššur) appropriates the title *waklum*, used by the former rulers of the city to describe themselves in their own correspondence.[408] Perhaps the duties of the

[405] M.5038: 12-14 and 25-30, text 23 in Ziegler 2002: 231-233.
[406] This is further apparent in A.4814: 32-33, text 411 in Charpin, Joannès, Lackenbacher, and Lafont 1988: 284-286. The text speaks of a joint army of 2,000 Babylonian soldiers and 2,000 soldiers from Ekallātum and Aššur under the command of Išme-Dagan's son Mut-Aškur.
[407] A.1965: 16-19, text 342 in Charpin, Joannès, Lackenbacher, and Lafont 1988: 112-113. For the rendering of *uštallaṭ* in the sense of "securing the right to move about freely", see note b in Charpin, Joannès, Lackenbacher, and Lafont 1988: 113.
[408] Note also the position *wakil tamkārī ša Šamšī-Adad* (overseer of the merchants of Šamšī-Adad), attested in text 15: 7-8 in Cagni 1980: 12-13. It is not clear what the relationship is between this position and the *wakil tamkārī*

Assyrian rulers that were not taken up by the new kings were instead assigned to this official, who could represent the interests of Assyrian merchants. The *wakil tamkārī Aššur* certainly appears to act in this capacity in our passage, where his actions are said to secure control of Karanā for all of Aššur. There is an interesting conflation here of Aššur as a whole with its merchants, pointing to the persistence of the view of Aššur as a community of people rather than simply a place. The same conclusion is implied by the orthography of Aššur in the letter, where it appears with both the divine and the geographic determinative signs. This is unlikely to be a relic of orthographic convention, as the simultaneous use of both determinatives was not the normative spelling of the term. Instead, it appears that there were still those who conceived of Aššur as a unity of god, place, and people.

But such conceptions and the efforts of Assyrians to maintain their social and political structures were confronted with the overwhelming power of Šamšī-Adad. This is manifest in a letter from Kanesh that demonstrates more clearly than any other text that the primacy of the *ālum* had been undone. The ruler of the Anatolian city Harsamna closes the caravan roads and complains to the Assyrians that their lord Šamšī-Adad has supported an enemy of his. He wants to know why the Assyrians did not stop Šamšī-Adad from doing so. The elders of the *ālum* reply that they tried to do so, that they made a formal request to Šamšī-Adad:

Aššur, if any. For further analysis of this problem with bibliography, see Veenhof 2008c: 140-141. Two individuals with the title *wakil tamkārī* are attested in Sippar in BM 97079 and BM 96968, for which see Veenhof 1991: 288-296.

tasliatam annītam ana bēlīni niṣbatma ana šēpēšu nimqutma umma šūtma attunu tamkārātunu yātum urdūya ū ša Ḫarsamnāyim urdūšūma kīšāma kakkam našâtunūma urkēya tatanallakā attunu tamkārātunu ša tamkārūtīkunu kīma tale''âni ḫarrānātim atallakā ana barīti šarrē kabtūtim niāti mīnam ṭaḫuātunu[409]

We submitted this petition to our lord and fell at his feet, but he said: "You, you are merchants! Are you my slaves or the slaves of the Harsamnean? Really, will you take up arms and follow after me? You are merchants! Keep occupying yourselves with your merchant business on the caravan roads, as you know how to do. Why are you getting involved with us important kings?"

As Šamšī-Adad's response demonstrates, Assyrian influence was scant and the participation of the Assyrian leadership in anything other than trade derided. The elders of the *ālum* address Šamšī-Adad as supplicatory inferiors, and they adopt the same language of subservience in their letter to the ruler of Harsamna. This ruler is, in turn, totally aware of the subjection of his Assyrian interlocutors to Šamšī-Adad. There is no trace here of a free, sovereign *ālum* that can conclude treaties with other polities on equal terms. This is, instead, a marginal community of merchants in a hostile world, subject to superiors both in Aššur and abroad. The *ālum* had lost its place, and the foundations of the Assyrian social category were eroding.

[409] Kt 01/k 217: 35-49 in Günbattı 2014: 88-91.

3.4.2 A Last Hurrah

Šamšī-Adad's conquest of Aššur wrought a constitutional revolution in that city. In the new dispensation, the established Assyrian stakeholders were the losers. Previously, free Assyrians had come together in their representative institutions to act upon the world as a collective force in pursuit of their own interests. Some elements of the previous order persisted, but the sovereign *ālum* was no more. In Aššur, Assyrians found that they were but one group among many carrying water for foreign kings. Abroad, the Assyrian position was undercut by the unpredictable situation in Aššur and the policies of the new rulers, whose interests were no longer automatically aligned with those of the Assyrian merchants. In both Upper Mesopotamia and Anatolia, changing political landscapes seem to have exerted further pressures on the rhythms of Assyrian life. Conflict interfered with commerce, and, regardless of its ultimate causes, trade with Anatolia declined.[410] Kanesh itself was burned to the ground in a conflict between Anatolians; Assyrians returned to the city, but all evidence of an Assyrian presence fades away by the end of the eighteenth century.[411] Anatolians also appear to have been learning from the Assyrians. Over time, there is increasing evidence of the adoption by Anatolians of Assyrian writing and business practices. In the Anatolian circuit, the Assyrian

[410] As per the discussion of Larsen 2015: 72-79. See Barjamovic, Hertel, and Larsen 2012: 73-80 for the view that the decline of Kanesh may not initially have meant a decline of the Anatolian trade altogether, but rather a shifting of regional patterns of trade – at least initially.
[411] Veenhof 2008c: 134-146 surveys the turbulent history of the last century of Assyrian settlement in Kanesh. Michel 2014: 78-79 does the same in more general terms.

mercantile monopoly appears to have been confronted with ever more able local competition. Assyrians were being squeezed from all sides.

Šamšī-Adad's kingdom did not outlive him. When Šamšī-Adad died in 1776 after 33 years of kingship over Aššur, the kingdom splintered. Aššur continued to be ruled by Šamšī-Adad's descendants as part of a smaller kingdom. According to the Assyrian King List, Šamšī-Adad's son Išme-Dagan ruled Aššur for another 40 years, and a variant king list suggests that Išme-Dagan was in turn succeeded by his son Mut-Asqur.[412] Aššur's status in this time is not as straightforward as the king list tradition suggests. No inscriptions survive for either Išme-Dagan or Mut-Asqur, raising questions about the duration and intensity of their rule over Aššur. As we know from the Mari texts, neither of these kings was based in Aššur, and both were involved in demanding wars with other polities. Išme-Dagan and Mut-Asqur represented the legacy of Šamšī-Adad. For Assyrians, this legacy entailed the realignment of political power to the detriment of the *ālum*. After Šamšī-Adad, his successors struggled to maintain control over Aššur. Their priorities lay elsewhere, and they faced many enemies. Into this vacuum stepped the forces of reaction.

The Assyrian king list tradition in all of its forms omits an individual named Puzur-Sîn. We nevertheless know that Puzur-Sîn ruled in Aššur because he left behind a remarkable

[412] For this variant king list, see Grayson 1980-83: 115.

inscription, incised into an alabaster tablet.[413] When Walter Andrae excavated this object in the beginning of the 20th century, he immediately identified it as Old Assyrian.[414] This identification was based on the obviously Old Assyrian character of the script, and it subsequently became clear that the text itself is also written in the Old Assyrian dialect.[415] The Old Assyrian aesthetic of the inscription sets it against the inscriptions of Šamšī-Adad, which are written in the Babylonian dialect and in Babylonian script.[416] It is not only aesthetically that Puzur-Sîn's inscription demonstrates a deliberate effort to reconnect with the old order in opposition to that of Šamšī-Adad. The text begins with the following partially broken introduction: *inūme Puzur-Sîn iššak Aššur mer Aššur-bēl-šamā'ē lemuttu Asīnim par'a Šamšī-Adad ša* [x x x] *ša ālim Aššur unappilu* (when Puzur-Sîn, the viceroy of Aššur, son of Aššur-bēl-šamê, uprooted the evil of Asīnim, the scion of Šamšī-Adad, [something] of *ālum* Aššur).[417] Puzur-Sîn introduces himself as the viceroy of Aššur, and by that title alone. This is a complete reversion to the narrow titulature of the Old Assyrian rulers, without any pretense of kingship or other allegiances. The traditionalist character of Puzur-Sîn is reinforced by his father's Assyrian name, which indicates that Puzur-Sîn is of and from the children of Aššur in a way that Šamšī-Adad and his

[413] For the edition of the text, see A.0.40.1001 in Grayson 1987: 77-78. Grayson 1985 offers an edition with fuller critical commentary.
[414] Andrae 1905: 29. It is, he says, an "altassyrischer Inschrift", and it was recovered from a secondary context. Its original setting and subsequent history is unknown. For more on the excavation of the inscriptions, see Andrae 1924.
[415] On these features, see Grayson 1985: 10 and Galter 2002-05: 6.
[416] As noted by Grayson 1985: 11 and Galter 2002-05: 6.
[417] A.0.40.1001: 1-8 in Grayson 1987: 77.

descendants were not and could not be. The inscription introduces Puzur-Sîn as part of a temporal clause that frames the entire text as the outcome of a particular act. That act is the uprooting of an evil thing perpetrated against *ālum* Aššur by Asīnum, an otherwise unknown descendant of Šamšī-Adad.[418] It is also possible that Asīnum is himself the evil thing being uprooted. After this introduction several lines of the text are poorly preserved and unintelligible. Excepting the memorable phrase *šibiṭ aḫītim lā šīr ālim Aššur* (an alien plague, not of the flesh of *ālum* Aššur), which features again later in the text, no consecutive sense can be made of the inscription at this point.

When it once again becomes possible to follow the narrative, the text continues along the same theme:

> *lā damqam šuāti ina qibit Aššurma bēlīyā qāt uppišu dūram u ekal Šamšī-Adad abu abīšu šibiṭ aḫītim lā šīr ālim Aššur ša išrāt ālim Aššur unakkirūma ekallam* [x x] *šuāti ēpušu aqqurma*[419]
>
> By the command of the god Aššur my lord, I tore down that wicked thing, the fortification that he [Asīnum] made, and the palace of Šamšī-Adad – his father's father,

[418] See Reade 2001: 6 (citing Irving Finkel) for the interpretation of the name Asīnum as a derogatory moniker derived from the term *assinnu*; the person referred to as Asīnum could thus represent someone else, like Mut-Asqur.
[419] A.0.40.1001: 19-29 in Grayson 1987: 78.

an alien plague, not of the flesh of *ālum* Aššur, who altered the holy places of Aššur – that [x x] palace which he made.

In this syntactically challenging passage, Puzur-Sîn declares that the god Aššur instructed him to demolish a wicked thing, namely a wall built by Asīnum and a palace constructed by Asīnum's grandfather Šamšī-Adad. Puzur-Sîn does so. The text describes Šamšī-Adad in two ways. First, he is "an alien plague, not of the flesh of Aššur", suggesting that the previous use of the same phrase likewise refers to Šamšī-Adad or his descendants. The message is unambiguous: Šamšī-Adad may have been king over Aššur, but he and his heirs were no Assyrians. This is communicated in the language of corporeal kinship – all Assyrians are brothers, of the same flesh. Šamšī-Adad is not of the flesh of *ālum* Aššur, and he is therefore not a part of the Assyrian community. The union of "flesh" with *ālum* Aššur is, moreover, a further revival of the conceptual union of people and place: Assyrians are *ālum* Aššur, and vice versa. Šamšī-Adad is additionally referred to as a foreign plague.[420] This is yet another corporeal metaphor that describes Šamšī-Adad as both extrinsic to the Assyrian social category and as a bodily affliction. Assyrians are imagined to constitute a single body politic, while Šamšī-Adad's rule is depicted as a debilitating condition afflicting that body politic. Second, Šamšī-Adad is accused of altering the holy places of Aššur. Although we can only guess at the referents of this accusation, it

[420] Galter 2002-05: 11-13 reflects at length on what he calls the xenophobia and ethnic nationalism of the inscription as a whole. He also frames the xenophobia as anti-Amorite, but there is no clear evidence that the animus is targeted at a particular social group rather than at the un-Assyrian regime.

seems contextually sound to understand it in the context of Šamšī-Adad's known work on the Aššur temple,[421] and particularly in the context of the elevation of Enlil at Aššur's expense. Assyrian traditionalists would have resented these changes and their implications, particularly as they pertained to the identification of the god Aššur with the deified community of Assyrians. Šamšī-Adad's religious reforms were an affront to the symbolic foundation of the Old Assyrian social category. They were yet another symptom of that king's pestilence, and Puzur-Sîn was there to treat them.

Puzur-Sîn's inscription could not be any clearer: the political order heralded by Šamšī-Adad's conquest of Aššur was an alien, un-Assyrian affair. It was time to restore the old order. The inscription adopts an Old Assyrian aesthetic, uses exclusively Old Assyrian titulature, and glories in the undoing of Šamšī-Adad's work. Puzur-Sîn's destruction of the palace of Šamšī-Adad is so thorough that it has left its mark on the archaeological record, leaving no inscribed material behind.[422] No political restoration would be complete without the *ālum*, that central and indispensable institution of the Old Assyrian social world. Although the chronology of this period is confused and the sources few, the treaty between *ālum* Aššur and the king of Apum dates to the same historical window as the Old Assyrian revival.[423] In the treaty, we see the

[421] As Russell 2017: 427 notes, Šamšī-Adad completely rebuilt this temple and appears to have reconstructed Aššur's monumental district in line with Babylonian practice.
[422] Miglus 1989: 117. As W. Mayer 1995: 162 puts it with reference to this destruction: "Damit wird der Sieg der Assyrischen Reaktion über die syrischen Usurpatoren markiert."
[423] See Eidem 1991: 192-195, who dates the treaty to around 1750 BCE and also interprets its contents as possibly indicative of Puzur-Sîn's agenda of restoration. It is possible to object that Išme-Dagan ruled into the 1730s according to the regnal length attributed to him by the Assyrian King List. One can also point out that Puzur-Sîn's

ālum once again representing Assyrians as a social category, acting on their behalf, and doing so freely; this freedom is all the more pronounced because the kingdom of Apum overlapped with the area where Šamšī-Adad had built his capital. It is tempting to link the confidence and assertiveness of the *ālum* in this treaty to its rehabilitation in the Aššur of Puzur-Sîn. If the *ālum* had returned to the center of Assyrian life, perhaps Puzur-Sîn was himself little more than a figurehead for a collective effort by a group of Assyrians to topple the regime of Šamšī-Adad and his successors. It is also possible that this effort was sponsored by the Babylonian king Hammurabi, who declares in a long list of epithets in the prologue to his law code that he is *mutīr lamassīšu damiqtim ana ālim Aššur* (the one who returns its protective spirit to *ālum* Aššur).[424] Be that as it may, the old regime was back. The counterrevolutionaries wanted the Assyrian social category to be central again, subject to nobody but its god. They wanted those powers that had been usurped by the foreign kings to be restored to Assyrians broadly, to be monopolized by category members along with the resulting material privileges. This was a rejection of Šamšī-Adad's universal kingdom and the triumph of Assyrian particularism – the victory of Assyrian *flesh* over the foreign plague.

inscription refers to Šamšī-Adad's grandson, so that Puzur-Sîn should be dated to the 1730s at the earliest. The AKL's data is dubious on this point, but the loose dating of the Apum treaty allows it to be moved to that time anyway. Further, the reference to Šamšī-Adad's grandson does not mean that we must wait for Išme-Dagan's death before inserting Puzur-Sîn into the chronological record. Asīnum could have been active in Aššur on his father's behalf while he ruled from Ekallātum, so that it is perfectly possible to date Puzur-Sîn's restoration to around 1750, just like the Apum treaty.

[424] CH iv 53-58 in Roth 1997: 80. This can also be interpreted as a claim to control over Aššur.

3.4.3 Reversion to the Norm

Like all movements of restoration, Puzur-Sîn's found that the world had not stood still in the interim. It was well and good to want to turn back the clock, but the old world no longer existed. Šamšī-Adad had changed the Upper Mesopotamian landscape. He swept away independent polities and forged one kingdom to rule them all. After his death, there were a great many wars over the spoils, creating instability and disrupting trade. Even more disruptive processes appear to have taken place in Anatolia, where the Hittite kingdom was undergoing its genesis. The Old Assyrian constitution arose in a particular context that was conducive to the conduct of extensive and expensive long-distance trade. By the time of Puzur-Sîn in the second half of the eighteenth century, this context had been reshaped. Trade with Anatolia had undergone dramatic decline, and evidence of the Assyrian presence dwindles to nothing by about 1700.[425] To the extent that Assyrian mercantile activities were now more geographically restricted, it is also the case that it was no longer possible for the Assyrians to monopolize a lucrative trading system all by themselves. Assyrian merchants in Upper Mesopotamia likely faced increased competition in a smaller market in which they had fewer advantages. There was, quite simply, less to go around. And what good was the *ālum* if it could not coordinate the distribution of plentiful economic opportunities among category members? Fewer resources meant fiercer competition for control over them, and their concentration in fewer hands.

[425] Michel 2014: 78-79.

Rewards could no longer be so broadly distributed among Assyrians, fraying the bonds of categorical solidarity.[426] In this climate, what was to keep the *ālum* from becoming the plaything of a handful of privileged Assyrians, and beyond that, a ruler with actual power?

We know very little about Assyrians between roughly 1700-1400. The drying up of evidence from Anatolia and the lack of a compensatory body of evidence from elsewhere make this a dark age from the perspective of scholarship. The persistence of Assyrian mercantile activity in the narrower Upper Mesopotamian circuit is documented in texts from Tigunānum. One letter indicates that there was an Assyrian merchant settlement in Burundum.[427] Another letter from the otherwise unattested Assyrian ruler Pilaḫ-Dagan to Tunip-Teššub of Tigunānum confirms that Assyrian merchants were still operating in the second half of the seventeenth century. In that letter, Pilaḫ-Dagan speaks of the *ḫarrānim ša tamkārī wardīya ša ēliš u šapliš ittanallaku* (the caravan of merchants, my servants, who constantly travel up and down).[428] These texts ostensibly demonstrate the continuity of the patterns of Old Assyrian life. Pilaḫ-Dagan's language, however, suggests the imperfection of Puzur-Sîn's restoration. Like Šamšī-Adad, Pilaḫ-Dagan refers to the merchants as servile people – *his* slaves, even. Pilaḫ-Dagan also

[426] Rising social inequality among Assyrians in Anatolia is noted by Larsen 2015: 77-78, who observes this development in the middle of the 19th century in the form of the rising status of the *dātum*-payers, for which see Dercksen 2004: 119-125. Analogous conditions – namely declining trade and capital accumulation – will also have prevailed in Aššur.

[427] George et al 2017: 100, fn. 5 (Lambert Folio 7754: 1-9). He is identified as a *tamkār Burundi* (merchant of Burundum), but his name is Aššur-rabi, suggesting both that he is Assyrian and that he represents an Assyrian merchant community in Burundum.

[428] George et al 2017: 99 (Lambert Folios 7637, 8202: 23-25).

addresses Tunip-Teššub as his brother, indicating that he regards himself as a potentate on equal footing with his counterpart. Given the context, this appears to be more than mere rhetoric: Pilaḫ-Dagan is not a ruler in the Old Assyrian tradition, but a petty potentate like so many others in Upper Mesopotamia at this time. Perhaps most alarming from the point of view of Puzur-Sîn, by the middle of the sixteenth century there are once again Assyrian rulers with the names Šamšī-Adad and Išme-Dagan. So much for removing the foreign plague – *kingship* had infected Aššur. The exact timeline is lost, but the *ālum* as the collective embodiment of the Assyrian social category is never to be seen again.

3.5 The Assyrian Social Category in the Old Assyrian Period

What, then, can we make of the Assyrian social category in the Old Assyrian period? The category is not reducible to any of the conventional conceptual clusters, though it aligns more closely with some than with others. It is unhelpful to think of Assyrians exclusively in terms of place, or kinship, or culture, or class, or whatever iteration of ethnicity strikes one as most apropos. While we cannot draw a precise boundary demarcating Assyrians from others, "Assyrianness" was not merely an artifact of being resident in Aššur, or of having been born there, or of speaking the Assyrian tongue, or of worshipping the Assyrian god, or of behaving in an Assyrian way. Inclusion in the Assyrian social category involved all of these things to differing extents, though it was not dependent on any of them and neither were any of them sufficient by themselves to merit inclusion in the category. Above all, Assyrianness was indexed to a

confluence of kinship and status. To be Assyrian, one needed to be integrated into the Assyrian kinship system, to be part of the metaphorical Assyrian family. Such integration was itself dependent on maintaining an appropriate social status – one had to be free. In the stratified Old Assyrian slave society, a state of unfreedom was incompatible with Assyrianness because it entailed subjection to others. Assyrians thought of themselves as an extended family. As is true of any family, there were differences of rank between family members: fathers were senior to sons. Beyond that, however, the Assyrian family was a community of equals in which all Assyrians were brothers. This outlook informs the Old Assyrian system of governance, which was based on popular assemblies both in Aššur and among Assyrians abroad. These assemblies, be it in their narrow or plenary forms, represented Assyrians collectively, acting in their name and on their behalf. Except for the hereditary office of the ruler, executive positions rotated among Assyrians, increasing the involvement and investment of category members in the joint project of government. Assyrians were those who could participate in this project. In a diminished capacity, the category also included those who would one day be able to participate in the project, namely minors, and those who were excluded from governance because of gender but who were otherwise part of the kinship system, namely women. The result was a tightly bounded social category that marked out Assyrians in Aššur from a large underclass of servile folk and from resident aliens.[429]

[429] Like visiting traders, itinerant craftsmen, pastoralists coming to market, etc. The status of resident aliens is likely to have been analogous to *metic*s in classical Athens or to non-citizens in Roman lands before 212 CE.

Considerable numbers of Assyrians lived and worked in Anatolia for extended periods. They did so on the basis of treaties that were sworn between local potentates and Assyrians as a collective body. These treaties secured total autonomy for the Assyrians, allowing them to maintain their own assemblies and legal procedures and to govern their own affairs. The result was that Assyrians operated – and were given license to operate – strictly *as Assyrians*, as individuals who belonged to the Assyrian social category. Without this categorical belonging, Assyrians would be unable to enjoy the freedom of movement and the protections upon which their business was utterly dependent. In this context, it was of utmost importance to police the categorical boundaries of Assyrianness and to systematically exclude anyone who might dilute the privileges and opportunities that were bound up with belonging to the category. The Assyrian mercantile network empowered all category members by giving them access to a profitable line of work and did so in opposition to outsiders, which ensured that the rewards of trade were not distributed too widely. This exclusionary attitude permeates the Old Assyrian texts, in which non-Assyrian Anatolians tend to be nameless *nuwā'um*s even as they dwell alongside, work closely with, and sometimes marry Assyrians. Servile people too are intimately bound up with Assyrians, but are systematically kept outside of the categorical walls. For all that they lived cheek by jowl with outsiders, Assyrians made sure to know who was in and who was out.[430]

[430] The constellation of *indicia* that Assyrians used to make such determinations is not fully recoverable.

Assyrianness was a closed network that granted insiders privileged access to political power and economic opportunity. Assyrians participated in self-government, and they pursued mercantile endeavors that were available to them because they had the political and financial support of their fellow category members as a collective body. Cooperation was facilitated by the development of a common public culture that involved reverence of the god Aššur and associated symbols, the replication of communal institutions and practices across space, and a sense of kinship.[431] This interface enabled the semantic convergence of god, place, and people in the common noun Aššur, as different manifestations of the same underlying unity. It also perpetuated the metaphor of Assyrians as a single family. The resulting group coherence allowed Assyrians to pool together their common resources and work toward the furtherance of shared interests. The Assyrian social contract was predicated on an equitable distribution of power and wealth. Both of these foundations were undercut toward the end of the 19th century BCE. The distribution of power among all Assyrians was overturned by Šamšī-Adad's conquest of Aššur and his usurpation of the powers of its assembly. The sources of wealth withered away as the Anatolian trade declined and political instability interfered with business, so that what little trade there was no longer sustained quite so many Assyrians as it once had. Despite the

[431] I use the concept of public culture here in the way that is outlined by A. Smith 2008: 36-37: "By the term 'public culture' I have in mind the creation of a system of public rites, symbols, and ceremonies, on the one hand, and on the other hand, the growth of distinctive public codes and literatures… public rituals, ceremonies, and symbol become widespread at a much earlier date, they are perceived to be essential for impressing on large segments of the population their common sense of belonging to a wider political and cultural community, be it ethnic community, church, city-state, or kingdom, and of affirming its vitality and legitimacy."

intervention of Puzur-Sîn, the Old Assyrian social contract was not restored effectively for anything more than a historical moment. In changed circumstances, it was not possible to reconstruct the carefully calibrated social balance of the beginning of the second millennium. Power became the preserve of potentates, and wealth the reward of a small subset of Assyrians rather than their common patrimony.

4. Aššur, King of the Gods: The Middle Assyrian Period (*c.* 1500-1000 BCE)

enūma Aššur bēlu ana palāḫīšu kīniš utânnīma ana rē'ûtīya ḫaṭṭa iddina ana nāqidūtīya šibirra uṣiba ana šagāš gērîya šuknuš lâdirīya mētellūte išruka agê bēlūti ēperanni ina kišādi mātāte šēpa ukīn rapšāti ṣalmāt qaqqadi kīma būli lū arte''e

When Aššur, the lord, faithfully appointed me to revere him, he gave me the scepter for my shepherdship, he added the staff of my pastorship, he granted me power to slaughter my enemies and to subjugate those who do not fear me, and covered my head with the crown of lordship. I set (my) foot upon the neck of the lands and shepherded the extensive black-headed people like a herd.

- *Inscription of Tukultī-Ninurta I*[432]

4.1 Out of the Darkness

The Old and Middle Assyrian periods are divided by an evidentiary hiatus that spans roughly three centuries (c. 1700-1400 BCE). No significant collections of texts have survived to shed light on developments in Aššur during this time. Despite the silence of our sources, the

[432] A.0.78.1: i 21-31 in Grayson 1987: 234.

situation in Aššur was by no means static. Around 1500, the inscriptional record of Assyrian rulers resumes following a protracted absence. The last known inscription from before this gap is that of Puzur-Sîn, who made it his work to extirpate all traces of Aššur's subjugation to Šamšī-Adad. It is ironic, therefore, that the resumption of the inscriptional record begins with a ruler named Šamšī-Adad.[433] Not only is this ruler named Šamšī-Adad: he is the son of Išme-Dagan, who is in turn the son of still another Šamšī-Adad. There is, accordingly, a sequence of three rulers in Aššur who bear the names of the original Šamšī-Adad and his son and successor.[434] In one of his inscriptions, moreover, Šamšī-Adad III refers explicitly to the first Šamšī-Adad, stating that he worked to restore the ziqqurrats that his namesake had built.[435] Over the centuries of silence, any outstanding conflict between the Old Assyrian tradition of collective governance and the monarchic model of Šamšī-Adad appears to have been resolved in the latter's favor – at least insofar as the onomastic preferences of Assyrian rulers can be regarded as indicative of prevailing attitudes.

At first, the inscriptional record of Assyrian rulers is intermittent, skipping some of the figures who feature in the Assyrian King List while including others. Over the course of the 15th century, the number of rulers with surviving inscriptions increases. By the end of the century,

[433] See Grayson 1987: 79-82 (A.0.59). Only five terse and fragmentary inscriptions can be linked to Šamšī-Adad III, and some of them tentatively at best.
[434] Galter 2002-2005: 17-18 identifies this as evidence of the defeat of Puzur-Sîn's agenda, arguing that the lack of any evidence of Puzur-Sîn beyond his own inscription points to a deliberate effort to erase him from the historical record.
[435] Grayson 1987: 81: A.0.59.1001.

there is an unbroken sequence of inscriptions that aligns with the testimony of the Assyrian King List. It is likely that some or all of the gaps in the inscriptional record are accidents of survival, but even so the increasing number and quality of inscriptions suggests a progressive improvement in the fortunes of Aššur. The character of the inscriptions as foundation deposits commemorating significant construction projects implies that an increase in the quantity of such inscriptions correlates with an increase in major building work, and presumably also with improved access to the resources required to support such work. Beyond that, the intensification of the inscriptional record points to political stability. Rulers succeed rulers in orderly succession, and they are increasingly able to pursue significant construction projects.

There is considerable continuity between the inscriptions of Aššur's 15th century rulers and those of their Old Assyrian predecessors. 15th century Assyrian rulers continue to eschew the royal title, styling themselves instead as viceroys of the god Aššur in line with the inherited model. This is as true for those potentates named after the arch-king Šamšī-Adad as it is for those with more conventional Assyrian names. In the only deviation from this titulature, one Assyrian ruler refers to a previous occupant of the office by the title *rubā'u* (ruler), which is nevertheless a title used by Old Assyrian rulers.[436] In addition to continuity in titulature, there is substantial continuity in the form and content of the inscriptions. There are, nevertheless, significant ruptures with established precedents. Such ruptures are apparent in the early 15th

[436] Aššur-bēl-nišēšu refers to Puzur-Aššur by this title in A.0.69.1: 6: *Puzur-Aššur rubā'u abī* (Puzur-Aššur the ruler, my ancestor). See Grayson 1987: 100.

century inscriptions of Puzur-Aššur III. Whereas all Old Assyrian inscriptions are found in Aššur itself, Puzur-Aššur III is the first ruler for whom we have inscriptions from elsewhere. An inscription recovered at a small site situated between Aššur and the Lower Zab bears the following text:

> *Puzur-Aššur iššak Aššur mār Aššur-nērārī iššak Aššurma ana balāṭīšu u šalām ālīšu āla Ḫabuba ina aḫi nār Zābi šaplî ištu uššēšu adi šaptīšu ēpuš temmēnīya u narêya aškun*
>
> Puzur-Aššur, viceroy of Aššur, son of Aššur-nērārī, viceroy of Aššur, for his life and the wellbeing of his city. I built the city Ḫabuba by the banks of the Lower Zab, from its foundations to its limits; I deposited my foundation document and my stele.[437]

The Assyrian ruler is here undertaking a project for which we know of no prior parallel, namely the construction of an altogether new settlement by the ruler.[438] This is the first indication of Aššur's development into something other than a city-state: as a polity, Aššur is now exerting

[437] Miglus 2011: 227, lines 1-8.

[438] Mühl 2015 notes that there is no evidence of expansion beyond the city of Aššur in the Old Assyrian period, and contrasts this with the evidence from the Middle Assyrian period. See Mühl 2015: 48: "While no Old Assyrian site was detected amongst the 64 sites investigated in the Makhul area, the situation is different for the Middle Assyrian period. Settlements were newly founded and established by the Assyrian state that was expanding beyond the borders of a city state. Taking direct control over the wider region reflected not only the Assyrian economic capability to do so, but also the political need to keep neighbouring entities, such as the kingdom of Arrapha and Kassite Babylonia, at a secure distance." See also Charpin and Durand 1997: 381-382, who conclude that there was no notion of an Assyria beyond the limits of the city of Aššur in the Old Assyrian period; it was then a city state without a meaningful politically co-identical hinterland. Cf. Koliński 1997 on Tell Rijim, which he identifies as an Old Assyrian site but for which there is no evidence of a political relationship with Aššur.

control over a landscape (a little bit) beyond its immediate hinterland.[439] In his inscriptions from Aššur, Puzur-Aššur III refers to various (re)construction projects, including work on the city walls and temples.[440] Later Assyrian rulers credit him with expanding the limits of the city of Aššur itself, building an *āle išše* (new city) beyond the city walls.[441] In harmony with the intensification of the inscriptional record, all of this points to the growth and material prosperity of 15th century Aššur, as well as to changes in long established patterns of settlement and government. Still another departure from attested Old Assyrian practices is the appearance in the 15th century of inscriptions on various jars marking these vessels as property of the palace of the ruler.[442] Such labelling implies ownership of the vessels by the palace as an autonomous institution. The operation of the palace as a body with agency is not documented in Aššur before this point, but is characteristic of the later Middle Assyrian period. It is, in any case, yet

[439] This shift is also apparent in the intensification of Assyrian settlement in the region of Aššur more broadly, as per Mühl 2015: 55: "Nevertheless, settlement data provide indirect evidence for intensified canal irrigation and land use on the higher river terraces: between the Ashur and Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta region on the one hand, and the Lesser Zab confluence, on the other, more than 30 Middle Assyrian sites are recorded. Among the excavated Middle Assyrian settlements within the region only a very small number of sites were associated with settlements of the preceding Old Assyrian period."

[440] See Grayson 1987: A.0.61.

[441] Grayson 1987: A.0.69.1, an inscription of Aššur-bēl-nišēšu, refers in lines 5-6 to: *dūra rabâ ša āle išše ša Puzur-Aššur rubā'u abī ēpušu* (the great wall of the new city that Puzur-Aššur the ruler, my forefather, made). This can only be a reference to Puzur-Aššur III, as Puzur-Aššur II ruled almost half a millennium previously. In A.0.76.13 Adad-nārārī likewise credits Puzur-Aššur with building the new city, as well as Aššur-bēl-nišēšu for doing further work on it.

[442] A.0.59.1, A.0.60.9, A.0.61.5, A.0.71.1, A.0.73.7, A.0.75.7, A.0.76.25, and *passim* in Grayson 1987. Because of the limited archaeological knowledge of the Old Assyrian levels of Aššur, it is conceivable that comparable material from the Old Assyrian period may yet be found.

more evidence of the arrogation of powers by Assyrian rulers relative to the Old Assyrian precedent.

The larger context in which the renascent Aššur found itself was, in important respects, different from that of the Old Assyrian period. By the fifteenth century, the fragmented world of city-states that had characterized much of the first half of the second millennium had been largely displaced. In its place, larger polities coalesced that exerted varying levels of control over extended territories.[443] These polities resembled Šamšī-Adad's abortive Upper Mesopotamian kingdom in their design and territorial reach, but enjoyed greater longevity. Rule by an independent king (*šarru*) and possession of a territorial heartland (*mātu*) distinguished the major powers from the smaller polities that they subsumed or drew into their orbit. In the fifteenth century, Aššur was caught between the established powers of Babylon and Mittani to its south and west respectively. For at least some of this time, the city appears to have fallen under Mittani's sway; a treaty between Mittani and Hatti records that a 15th century Mittanian king had plundered Aššur, and that Aššur had for a time paid tribute to Mittani.[444] The period of Mittanian domination may well have lasted into the middle of the 14th century,[445] when things took a decisive turn.

[443] For an account of this world system, see Liverani 2001: Part 1.
[444] For a translation of the relevant treaty between the 14th century king of Mittani Shattiwaza and the Hittite Suppiluliuma I, see Beckman 1996a: 44-50.
[445] So argues Maidman 2011: 104.

The 14th century marks a watershed in Assyrian history. Aššur's place in the world undergoes a remarkable transformation, and the polity is gradually refashioned in the image of the great powers. This entails independent kingship and extended territorial control. Territorial expansion is apparent under Aššur-uballiṭ (1363-1328 BCE),[446] who did away with any outstanding vestiges of Mittanian hegemony and forcibly asserted dominion over nearby polities like Arrapḫa and Nuzi, as well as over other lands in the environs of Aššur.[447] Aššur-uballiṭ's expansionist policy is later pursued by his successors, with spectacular success in the 13th century. In addition to the assembly of the requisite territorial base for great power status, the 14th century heralds the adoption of the royal title by Aššur's hereditary viceroys. The earliest evidence of an Assyrian ruler adopting the title of *šarru* (king) dates again to the reign of Aššur-uballiṭ. In two surviving letters to the Pharaoh of Egypt, Aššur-uballiṭ styles himself king, in the latter of the two going so far as to call himself Pharaoh's brother and thus claiming parity according to the diplomatic language of the day: *umma Aššur-uballiṭ šar māt Aššur šarru rabû aḫūkāma* (thus speaks Aššur-uballiṭ, king of the land of Aššur, great king, your brother).[448]

[446] Or 1353-1318, depending on whether one accepts 13 or 3 years as the regnal length of the later Assyrian monarch Ninurta-apil-Ekur. Both regnal lengths are attested in variant manuscripts of the Assyrian King List, for which see Grayson 1980-83.

[447] For Aššur-uballiṭ's conquest of Arrapḫa and Nuzi, see Maidman 2011; for other areas of expansion, see A.0.76.1: 27-32 in Grayson 1987: 132.

[448] See the introductory lines of Amarna letters 15 (Artzi 1978 and Rainey 2015: 128-129) and 16 (Artzi 1997 and Rainey 2015: 130-133). It is worth noting that EA 16: 19-21 refers to previous diplomatic communication between the Pharaoh and Aššur-uballiṭ's predecessor Aššur-nādin-aḫḫē. This suggests an otherwise undocumented prehistory for Aššur's ascent to great power status, which was punctuated by episodes of subjection to Mittani. Such a prehistory is also echoed by the Synchronistic History (Chronicle 21 in Grayson 2000: 157-170), which situates the beginning of equal relations between Aššur and Babylonia no later than the end of the 15th century.

Aššur-uballiṭ also styles himself king in his surviving seal, which identifies him as *šar māt Aššur* (king of the land of Aššur).[449] Although Aššur-uballiṭ avoids the royal title in his inscriptions, his grandson has no such compunctions. He is Arik-dīn-ili, *šarru dannu šar māt Aššur* (strong king, king of the land of Aššur), the scion of a line of individuals whom he likewise calls kings of the land of Aššur.[450] All subsequent Assyrian rulers unabashedly style themselves kings in their inscriptions and elsewhere. By the end of the 14th century, Aššur is a kingdom in the mold of the other great powers. It has kings, and it has a stable territorial base far beyond the city-limits. The territories ruled from Aššur are henceforth referred to as *māt Aššur* – the land of Aššur.[451] Assyria, in better English.

In the 13th century, the kingdom of Assyria is firmly established as a major power. It expands its territorial control in multiple directions, but primarily toward the west, across the Jazira. Assyria contributes to the dissolution of the kingdom of Mittani and integrates much of the former Mittanian heartland along the Ḫabur river into its own realm. Although the kingdom engages in numerous armed conflicts with great and minor powers alike, it is able to maintain its position as a major territorial kingdom through to the end of the second millennium. There

[449] A.0.73.6: 3 in Grayson 1987: 114-115. For the later diplomatic correspondence between Assyria and the Hittite kingdom, see Mora and Giorgieri 2004.
[450] A.0.75.1: 1-3 and 11-13 in Grayson 1987: 120-122. Arik-dīn-ili extends the royal title to his grandfather Aššur-uballiṭ and even to his great-grandfather, of whom there is no suggestion that he ever claimed it himself.
[451] See Cancik-Kirschbaum 2014b: 291 for the view that the formula *māt Aššur* is derived from the analogous formulations current among the other great powers. Note, however, that this formula is already attested in texts from Nuzi before its fall, for which see texts 1-4 in Maidman 2010: 20-25 and *passim*.

are times of expansion and times of contraction, but the kingdom of Assyria as a coherent political entity with a stable institutional framework remains.

4.2 The Institutional Framework

4.2.1 The King

The Middle Assyrian political order established in the 14th century is unlike that of the Old Assyrian period. There are no more references to the *ālum* as an assembly of any sort. In the central, sovereign place of the *ālum*, there looms instead the figure of the king. Because there was no established tradition of authoritarian kingship in Aššur, its rulers had to look elsewhere for models to emulate. Beyond following the immediate example of the other contemporary great powers, there was a conscious effort to emulate the precedent set by Šamšī-Adad, the only major king to have also claimed to be the viceroy of Aššur.[452] Such emulation is reflected both in explicit references to Šamšī-Adad as the royal predecessor of Middle Assyrian kings[453] and in their adoption of much of his titulature. As in so many things, Aššur-uballiṭ is the first: he adopts the introductory formula of most of Šamšī-Adad's

[452] For Šamšī-Adad's own emulation of the model of the kings of Akkad and its influence on subsequent Assyrian discourse, see Pongratz-Leisten 2015: 142-144.

[453] Pongratz-Leisten 1997: 101-102 observes that Šamšī-Adad is referred to explicitly as *šarru ālik pānīya* (my royal predecessor) in the inscriptions of the Middle Assyrian kings Shalmaneser I and Tiglath-Pileser I (A.0.77.17: 6-7 and A.0.87.12: 24-25 in Grayson 1987: 206 and Grayson 1991: 58-59 respectively). Pongratz-Leisten also observes that the Middle Assyrian kings are careful to note that Šamšī-Adad is not their genealogical ancestor. There is, however, a prayer to Ištar in which Ashurnasirpal I refers to himself as *mār Šamšī-Adad pāliḫ ilāni rabûti* (the son of Šamšī-Adad, the one who reveres the great gods), for which see von Soden 1974-77: 39: line 21. The efforts of Middle Assyrian kings to emphasize their connection with Šamšī-Adad thus crosses boundaries of genre, and manifests in this case without genealogical scruples.

inscriptions verbatim, substituting his own name for that of his illustrious model. He becomes *Aššur-uballiṭ šakin Enlil iššak Aššur* (Aššur-uballiṭ, appointee of the god Enlil, viceroy of Aššur).[454] One notable consequence of the direct adoption of this formula is the fact that it prioritizes Aššur-uballiṭ's relationship with Enlil at the expense of Aššur. The peculiarity of this inversion is magnified by the fact that no previous Assyrian ruler so much as expresses a relationship with Enlil, never mind placing him before Aššur. The titles of Middle Assyrian kings multiply exponentially in subsequent decades, including the adoption of Šamšī-Adad's royal epithets.[455] Despite the proliferation of titles, the particular formula of Šamšī-Adad and Aššur-uballiṭ resurfaces unchanged in the inscriptions of most Middle Assyrian kings, perpetuating the priority of Enlil.[456]

It is not only in the realm of titulature that a deliberate effort is made to establish a pedigree for Assyrian kingship. Such an effort is most obvious in the 14th century compilation and subsequent transmission of the Assyrian King List.[457] This text serves as a record of all Assyrian rulers, extending over centuries and reaching into the mythical past. It also

[454] For the original appearance of this formula in the inscriptions of Šamšī-Adad, see for instance A.0.39.3: 1-3 in Grayson 1987: 55. For its appearance in an inscription of Aššur-uballiṭ, see for instance A.0.73.1: 13 in Grayson 1987: 110.
[455] As with the title *šar kiššatim* (king of totality). For its use by Šamšī-Adad, see A.0.39.1: 2 in Grayson 1987: 48. Adad-nārārî I is the first Assyrian king to use the title early in the 13th century, and it is ubiquitous in his inscriptions, for which see A.0.76.3: 1, A.0.76.9: 1, A.0.76.26: 1, A.0.76.29: 1, A.0.76.30: 1, A.0.76.31: 1, A.0.76.33: 2, A.0.76.34: 2, A.0.76.36: 1, A.0.76.37: 1, A.0.76.38: 2, and *passim* in Grayson 1987.
[456] For attestations of the formula in the inscriptions of other Middle Assyrian kings, see for instance A.0.76.14: 1, A.0.77.1: 1, A.0.78.17: 1-2, A.0.79.1: 1-2, and *passim*, all in Grayson 1987.
[457] For an account of the origins and political purpose of this text, see Valk Forthcoming.

retroactively ascribes the royal title to all previous Assyrian rulers, referring to them as kings even though these individuals never adopted the title themselves. The result is the fabrication of a historical narrative in which the institution of kingship is imagined to be coeval with Aššur itself. Kingship is regarded as the defining fixture of the Assyrian political constitution, primordial and inalterable. This illusion of institutional continuity enables the Middle Assyrian kings to rub shoulders more easily with their great power counterparts and to justify more readily their own centrality in Assyrian political life.

The ideological construction of Assyrian kingship is encapsulated by the Middle Assyrian coronation ritual. It is not clear if this ritual was performed only upon the ascension of a new king to the throne, or on other occasions too.[458] It is likewise not clear precisely when this ritual was first performed, though the manuscript we have likely dates to around 1200 BCE.[459] The ritual itself combines elements of the Old and Middle Assyrian political constitutions. It is conducted largely in the Aššur temple and is officiated by a priest of Aššur. The king is carried into the temple in the presence of the grandees of the kingdom and the royal eunuchs: *ana bīt ili errubū šangû ša Aššur ina pānīšunu lēt šarri imaḫḫaṣ akia iqabbi Aššur šarru Aššur šarru* (they

[458] As Jakob 2017: 149 notes, "whether it was a one-time act on the occasion of the king's accession to the throne or, rather, was performed periodically (once a year, for instance), is still contested." The New Year festival would be the most likely candidate for any annual performance of the ritual.

[459] Only one Middle Assyrian manuscript of the text has been found, and it dates to the second half of the 13th century at the earliest, for which see most recently Jakob 2017: 144-145 and Kryszat 2008: 113-114. The dating is based in large part on a reference in the manuscript to the gods of Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta, which was only built toward the end of the 13th century and did not significantly outlive its namesake as an administrative and religious center (see lines iii 39-41 in Parpola 2017: 18). See also Kryszat 2008: 109-110 for the argument that the known manuscript is a school text, accounting for some of its more curious characteristics.

enter the temple of God. The priest of Aššur strikes the king's cheek in their presence and speaks thus: "Aššur is king! Aššur is king!").[460] This echoes the Old Assyrian formula of rulership, which asserts that the city/god/community Aššur is king and that the Assyrian ruler is merely its/his representative. In the coronation ritual, the priest of Aššur proclaims that it is the god Aššur who is king, and physically strikes the earthly king in full view of the leading men of the kingdom. This act is a visceral demonstration of the god's primacy. The king is subsequently crowned by the priest of Aššur, which again reinforces the primacy of the god, as the king is given his crown by an agent of Aššur. After the act of coronation, the assembled participants bless the king in the following terms:

> *rabûtu šūt rēšē šarri akīa iqabbû mā kulūli ša rēšēka mā Aššur Mullissu bēlū ša kulūlīka meat šanāti līpirūka šēpka ina Ekur u qātēka ina irti Aššur ilīka lū ṭāb ina maḫar Aššur ilīka šangûtka u šangûta ša mārēka lū ṭābat ina ešarte ḫaṭṭīka mātka rappiš qabâ šemâ magīra kitta salīma Aššur liddinakku*
>
> The grandees and the royal eunuchs speak thus: "May Aššur and Mullissu, the lords of your crown, cover you with the crown of your head for a hundred years! May your foot be pleasing in the Ekur temple, and your hand on the breast of Aššur, your god! May your priesthood and the priesthood of your sons be pleasing before Aššur, your god!

[460] Lines i 27-29 according to the most recent edition of the text, for which see Parpola 2017: 14-18. The text is partially broken before this passage, but the presence of the grandees and the eunuchs is implicit. For the standard edition of the text, see Müller 1937.

Expand your land by your just scepter! May Aššur grant you command, understanding, obedience, stability, and peace!"[461]

The blessing recognizes that the king's success is contingent upon pleasing the god Aššur, emphasizing the king's responsibilities to the deity. It also enjoins the king to expand his land, positioning territorial expansion among the chief obligations of kingship. Once the king has been crowned, the assembled grandees and royal eunuchs prostrate themselves, kiss the king's feet, and give him gifts. In a symbolic demonstration of the king's total authority over them, they submit to the king:

ištu nāmurāte ana šarri uqarribūni sukkallu rabi'u sukkallu šanī'u ḫaṭṭāte ana pān šarri ikarrurū rab urtāni kīsīšu rab zammāri sammêšu u attamannu bēl pāḫete ša ukallūni mazzaltāšunu uššurū ipatte'ū izzazzū šarru iqabbiaššunu mā iāmuttu pāḫassu luka''il uška'anū iggarrarū iqarribū iāmatu ina mazzaltēšu izzaz

After they offer their audience-gifts to the king, the grand vizier and the vice vizier lay down (their) scepters before the king, the chief commander his purse, the chief singer his harp, and each and every governor of a province [the insignia] that he holds. They abandon their posts, distance themselves, and stand. The king says to them: "Everyone

[461] Lines ii 28-36 in Parpola 2017: 16.

shall keep his office!" They prostrate themselves, roll over, and approach. Each one stands at his post.[462]

One after the other, the occupants of the major offices of state ceremonially step down, before the king permits them to stay on – upon which they repeat their demonstration of total subservience through the act of prostration and rolling over (*nagarruru*). The coronation ritual performs the ideological superstructure of Assyrian kingship. The king is king by grace of the god Aššur, on whose behalf he rules. In this endeavor, the king is aided by a suite of servants, who are conceived as being as distant from and subservient to him as he is to the god. Old Assyrian government was characterized by a tripartite division of powers between the *ālum*, *līmum*, and ruler, in which each had their own distinct spheres of authority. Middle Assyrian government is, by contrast, conceived as an explicitly vertical hierarchy descending from the god Aššur to the king and from the king to the grandees, in which power flows downward as a revocable favor.

Because the god Aššur sits at the apex of the hierarchy and is the fount of all power, he is omnipresent in the inscriptions of the Middle Assyrian kings. Royal actions are justified by stating that they were undertaken at the command of Aššur,[463] while military victories are depicted as the inevitable consequence of Aššur's help and support – as well as the help and

[462] Lines iii 7-14 in Parpola 2017: 17.
[463] Most strikingly in the case of the construction of Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta, for which see for instance A.0.78.25: 9-17 in Grayson 1987: 277.

support of the other great gods.[464] The preeminence of Aššur pervades Middle Assyrian literature. Aššur is invariably depicted as all-conquering and ever-victorious. There are statements like *ana Aššur iknušū kališ ḫuršānū* (to the god Aššur, all the mountain lands submitted),[465] or *ša ana Aššur iḫaṭṭû immi karmiš lazmur līt Aššur dayyāna ša ittallaka ana* [x] (whoever sins against Aššur will become a heap of ruins; let me sing of the triumph of Aššur, the judge, who goes out to [x]).[466] When Aššur is involved, resistance is futile. Aššur does more than issue commands and guarantee victory. He is personally identified with the kingdom of Assyria. The land ruled by the Assyrian king is *mātīka* ^{d}*Aššur* (your land, oh Aššur!), and the city Aššur is *ālīka* ^{d}*Aššur* (your city, oh Aššur!).[467] As is highlighted in the Middle Assyrian coronation ritual, the king' mandate included the expansion of his territory.[468] This is reflected in royal inscriptions, which from the 13th century onward speak programmatically to the king's fulfillment of this charge. In this way, an inscription of Tiglath-Pileser states the following concerning Aššur and the great gods: *miṣir mātīšunu ruppuša iqbûni… muḫḫi māt Aššur māta muḫḫi nišēša nišē luraddi miṣir mātīya ureppišma gimir mātātīšunu abēl* (they commanded me to expand the border of their land… I added land to the land of Aššur and people to its people. I

[464] A sketch of this ideological construct is presented in Liverani 2017: Chapter 2, albeit with an emphasis on the Neo-Assyrian evidence.
[465] LKA 62 R'6-7 in Ebeling 1949 and Edzard 2004. Edzard understands the text as a parody because of some of its more unusual features, among them talking donkeys. Even if it is a parody, it does not challenge the ideological supremacy of Aššur.
[466] LKA 63: R'22 in Hurowitz and Goodnick Westenholz 1990: 5.
[467] These formulations appear in a Middle Assyrian psalm to Aššur, for which see Ebeling 1918: 62-70. It is clear from the context that the god Aššur is being addressed directly, rather than that the term Aššur being used to specify the intended land and city.
[468] See Pongratz-Leisten 2015: Chapter 4 for a deeper exploration of this imperative.

expanded the border of my land and ruled over all their lands).[469] It should be noted that in this passage the king is enjoined to expand the gods' land, which he then refers to as his own land. The two are synonymous. As the chosen agent of the gods, their land is his land, and his land is theirs.

Aššur was the ultimate source of power, and thus chief among the gods. This presented a problem in the context of the broader Mesopotamian pantheon, in which Enlil occupied the preeminent position. To resolve this tension, Aššur was reimagined as the Assyrian iteration of Enlil. A fragment of a literary text describes Aššur both as *bēl mātāte Enlil aššurê* (lord of the lands, the Assyrian Enlil) and as *Aššur šar ilāni* (Aššur, king of the gods).[470] The co-appearance of these epithets makes explicit the identification of Aššur with Enlil.[471] References to Enlil in Assyrian royal inscriptions, as in the formula borrowed by Middle Assyrian kings from Šamšī-Adad, can therefore be regarded in many contexts as references to Aššur. Aššur is Enlil, and

[469] A.0.87.1: i 48-49 and 59-61 in Grayson 1991: 13.

[470] K 6007 in Borger 1964: 73. Foster 2005: 299 identifies this fragment as the prologue of the Tukultī-Ninurta epic, stating on page 317 that this identification follows the suggestion of W. G. Lambert. The description of Aššur as the Assyrian Enlil also features in a Middle Assyrian psalm to Aššur, for which see Ebeling 1918: 64: line 39: *Enlil Aššurû bēl mātāte* (Assyrian Enlil, lord of the lands), and in the Tukultī-Ninurta Epic, for which see Machinist 1978: 130: B vi 20: *Enlil Aššurî* (Enlil of the Assyrians).

[471] In A.0.78.22: 39 in Grayson 1987: 270, Grayson reads a reference to "the god Aššur-Enlil", which makes explicit the equation and identity of the two gods. It is, however, possible to read Aššur instead as a qualifier for the preceding word *ālīya*. In that scenario, it is the god Enlil who is depicted as commissioning the construction of Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta, whereas elsewhere it is the god Aššur who does so. As such, both readings produce the unequivocal equation of Aššur and Enlil, one directly and the other comparatively.

thus unproblematically first among the gods.[472] Aššur is at one and the same time a particularly Assyrian god, and the king of the gods.

The king serves at the pleasure of Aššur, but is himself as close to divine as it is possible for a mortal to be. This unique position as interlocutor between gods and mortals is exemplified in the Tukultī-Ninurta Epic, which celebrates that Middle Assyrian king's victory over his Babylonian counterpart. Tukultī-Ninurta is described as uniquely favored by the gods, and as a god among men. He is endowed with the characteristics of the gods, and is among people what Enlil/Aššur is among gods: foremost.

Tukultī-Ninurta Epic A i 9-22 and F 2-14

šarraḫat mamlūssu tušarrap lā ādirē pāna u arka	Outstanding is his fervor, it burns the irreverent front and rear,
qā'edat erḫūssu tuḫammaṭ lā šēmî šumēla u imna	Blazing is his bellicosity, it scorches the disobedient right and left.
galtū melammūšu usaḫḫapū nagab zayyārē	Fearsome is his radiance, it overwhelms all enemies,

[472] The predilection for using the divine name Enlil instead of Aššur in some Middle Assyrian literary texts might be attributable in large measure to the presence of Babylonian scribes at the Assyrian court. See Wiggermann 2008 for a notable example.

ša kippat šārē erbetti šāmitu[473] *ītanaddarūš*	Of the extent of the four winds he marks his
puḫur kal šarrāne	mastery: together all kings are in constant fear of him.
kīma Addi ana šagimmēšu īttarrarū šadû	Like the god Adad, the mountains tremble at his roars,
u kīma Ninurta ana nīš kakkēšu ultanapšaqā	and like the god Ninurta, the whole world is
kališ kibrātim	convulsed at the raising of his weapon.
ina šīmat Nudimmudma mani itti šēr ilānīma	By the decree of the god Nudimmud, his
minâšu	substance is reckoned with the flesh of the gods,
ina purussê bēl mātāte ina rāṭ šaturri ilāni	By the decision of the Lord of the lands, his
šipikšu ītešra	form was directed in the channel of the womb of the gods.
šūma ṣalam Enlil dārû šēmû pī nišē milik	He is the everlasting image of Enlil, who
māte	hears the voice of the people, the counsel of the land.

[473] The sign sequence is *šá-im-tu* (Machinist 1978: 66, line 13), and has confounded editors of the text. Machinist 1978: 188-190 discusses the problem and reviews some previous literature, but does not resolve the matter. The sign sequence is only attested in one manuscript of the text (F), for which see Lambert 1957-58: 48-51 and Plate IV. I suggest tentatively that the sign IM represents an error of syllable inversion, as per Worthington 2012: 111-112 (§3.2.13). Emending IM to MI produces *šá-mi-tu*, a participle of *šamātu*, "to brand, mark (property)". Tukultī-Ninurta is thus "the one who brands the full extent of the four winds", ie., the one who demonstrates mastery of the world.

kīma šâšu ana pāni redê bēl mātāte umandûš	As the Lord of the lands designated him to
i''ud ina šaptī	lead the troops, so he praised him with his lips,
ušarbīšūma Enlil kīma abi ālidi arki māri	Enlil elevated him like a birth father, second
bukrēšu	only to his firstborn son.
aqar ina šīmēšu ašar šitnune rašâššu andilla	His price is dear, the battlefield offers him protection,
ul išnun matīma ina šarrāne kullati qabalšu	Never did any among all the kings ever rival
mamma	him in combat.[474]

How far we have travelled from the supremacy of the *ālum*! There is no trace of community here, no sense of collective purpose. At best, the king acknowledges that he hears the people, that he is responsive to them. But only *he* acts – and who are they anyway, the people? His subjects? Assyrians? Humanity? They are a non-entity, and their appearance represents the barest acknowledgement that there are mortals other than the king. In this worldview there are gods, and there is the king, himself a demigod; below them is the teeming mass of humanity, including all the others who have the temerity to call themselves kings. The special relationship between Assyrian kings and the divine sphere is reflected in the adoption by these kings of the

[474] Machinist 1978: 66-71 and Lambert 1957-58: 48-51.

title *šangû* (priest) in various forms.[475] Beyond royal inscriptions, there are administrative texts concerning a cult of deceased kings.[476] Documented Middle Assyrian royal journeys are, in turn, often linked to participation in religious rites, pointing to the centrality of ritual practice in the exercise of kingship.[477] More prosaically, the king's closeness to the god Aššur is apparent in the description of the concluding act of one treaty. The king swears by one god only, *his* god: *šarru napšāte ša Aššur ilīšu ittama* (the king has sworn by the life of the god Aššur, his god).[478]

As refracted through the lens of Middle Assyrian literature and royal inscriptions, the Assyrian king appears as an omnipotent figure. Both the extent of the king's power and its limits are exemplified by the construction of Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta. In the second half of the 13th century, king Tukultī-Ninurta decided to build a vast new city across the river from Aššur and three kilometers to its north.[479] This city, named after the king himself (the name translates as 'Quay of Tukultī-Ninurta'), was constructed at great speed. There arose in the immediate vicinity of Aššur an entirely new urban center, fully equipped with palatial buildings, temples,

[475] Adad-nārārî I calls himself *šangû ṣīru ša Enlil* (exalted priest of Enlil) in A.0.76.1: 18 (Grayson 1987: 132) and refers to Aššur-uballiṭ's priesthood (*šangûssu*) in A.0.76.1: 28-29 (Grayson 1987: 132). Tukultī-Ninurta refers to the priesthood of his ancestors in A.0.78.10: 12-13 (Grayson 1987: 240), call himself *šangû ṣīru* (exalted priest) in A.0.78.21: 6 and A.0.78.23: 14-15 (Grayson 1987: 269 and 271-272 respectively), and calls himself *išippu rēštu* (foremost priest) in A.0.78.23: 8 (Grayson 1987: 271). Aššur-rēša-iši refers to his priesthood (*šangûssu*) in A.0.86.1: 4 and A.0.86.2: 2 (Grayson 1987: 310 and 312 respectively). The king's priesthood is likewise referenced in the Assyrian coronation ritual.

[476] See Cancik-Kirschbaum 2012a for text editions and discussion.

[477] As noted by Llop and Shibata 2016: 91.

[478] MARV 4.119: 29-30 in Freydank 2012: 229-230.

[479] For the archaeology of Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta, see Eickhoff 1985. For more on the history and purpose of Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta, see most recently the concise overview with references of Maul 2017: 340; for a more detailed analysis, see Dolce 1997, Gilibert 2008, and Freydank 2009.

and walls, and supported by an agricultural hinterland that was brought under cultivation for this purpose. The project is an extraordinary display of Tukultī-Ninurta's power. Logistically, it presupposed immense resources over many years. As is recorded in surviving administrative texts, thousands upon thousands of workers labored on the site, consuming correspondingly extensive supplies of food, as well as the materials required to build the many new structures.[480] Ideologically, the construction of Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta represented an astonishing breach with tradition. For a few brief years, the city was the principal seat of kingship – *šubat šarrūtīya* (the dwelling of my kingship) and *māḫāz bēlūtīya* (the sanctuary of my sovereignty), in the words of Tukultī-Ninurta's inscriptions.[481] The rise of kingship represented the abandonment of the *ālum* as the foundation of the Assyrian polity. In the same vein, the move to Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta represented the first bold step toward the abandonment of earthly Aššur as the fulcrum of Assyrian political life. The king was already elevated beyond any civic community based in Aššur. Now, he was staking a claim to a status above and unmoored from the city of Aššur itself.

[480] Based on administrative texts recording the supply of grain to workers, Freydank 1975: 60 calculates that about 7,300 workers at Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta were being fed by the state; on the basis of the same sources, Jakob 2003: 89-90 reaches the figure of 8,000 workers. These figures account for only one component of the workforce rather than for the workforce as a whole.

[481] A.0.78.22: 41 and 61 respectively in Grayson 1987: 270. It is also worth noting that the king's new palace in Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta is named Egalmešarra, "house of the universe", confirming the notion that the city was intended to be the principal seat of kingship, and not merely a new provincial base.

Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta is a physical manifestation of the power of the Assyrian king, but it also points to the limits of his power. Although its construction as the new royal seat represents a serious break with the past, the entire enterprise is advanced under the mantle of tradition. In royal inscriptions, it is presented in the following terms:

> *ina ūmīšūma eberti ālīya āla ba''īt ilāni Aššur bēlu māḫāza īrišannīma epēš atmanīšu iqbâ ana zikir Aššur ilu rā'imīya muḫurti ālīya Aššur itât Idiqlat ina namê ugārē arbūti ašar bītu u šubtu lā bašû tillu u eperu lā šapkūma libnatu lā nadât āla Aššur ina ebertān lū ēpuš āl Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta šumšu abbi*
>
> At that time, the lord Aššur requested of me a sanctuary, a city desired by the gods, across from my city, and instructed me to build his holy place. At the command of Aššur, the god who loves me, I built before my city Aššur a city across the river from Aššur, bordering the Tigris, in uncultivated pasturelands and meadows, where there was neither house nor dwelling, where no ruin mounds or rubble had accumulated, where no brick had been laid. I named it Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta.[482]

This passage draws repeated attention to the fact that it is the god Aššur himself, supported by the other gods, who demands the construction of Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta, and that this new city is

[482] A.0.78.23: 88-100 in Grayson 1987: 273.

conceived as a place holy to the gods.[483] It likewise draws repeated attention to the king's ongoing relationship with the city Aššur, both by emphasizing the proximity of the new city to Aššur and by referring to Aššur explicitly as "my city".[484] The message is that Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta is willed by the gods and that its coming does not spell the end of Aššur's special status. Tukultī-Ninurta might want a fresh start, but he can only have it if he presents it as an altogether natural evolution that supplements rather than detracts from the established dispensation.[485] Despite the extraordinary investment in the city's construction, Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta came to an ignominious end. The same is true of the city's founder and namesake. A chronicle records of Tukultī-Ninurta that *Aššur-nāṣir-apli mārūšu u rabûti ša māt Aššur ibbalkitūšūma ina kussêšu idkûšūma ina Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta ina bīti īsirūšūma ina kakki idūkūšu* (his son Ashurnasirpal and the grandees of the land of Aššur rebelled against him, lifted him off of his throne, shut him up in a house in Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta, and killed him with a weapon).[486] It is not clear to what extent

[483] Indeed, in A.0.78.22: 43-45 in Grayson 1987: 270, Tukultī-Ninurta states that he built temples to Aššur, Adad, Šamaš, Ninurta, Nusku, Nergal, the Sebetti, and Ištar – *ilāni rabûti bēlīya* (the great gods my lords) – in Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta. This was a city for all the gods, with Aššur at their head.

[484] This is Aššur' established and unique designation in inscriptions; it is telling that this inscription refers to both Aššur and Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta as "my city" (see *ālīya Aššur* and *ālīya Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta* in A.0.78.23: 93 and 110 respectively in Grayson 1987: 273-274). The old city and the new are equals.

[485] The supplementary character of Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta has been noted by van de Mieroop 1999a: 59-60: "Tukulti-Ninurta highlighted in his inscriptions that Kar-Tukulti-Ninurta was a religious centre to complement the old city of Assur, not a new city to replace it. New work was depicted as the expansion of something that already existed". Much the same observation has been made in the context of the city's Aššur temple by Maul 2017: 340: "Yet the magnificent temple building was probably thought of only as a temporary residence of the god, to be used in the context of festive ceremonies associated with processions – due to its comparatively small size, it seems unlikely that it was meant to completely replace the old Assur temple." Gilibert 2008 also stresses the emphasis on continuity.

[486] Chronicle P: iv 10-11, for which see Chronicle 22 in Grayson 2000: 176.

Tukultī-Ninurta's assassination should be related to his construction of Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta. It is, however, telling that the city was abandoned not long after his death, never to serve again as an Assyrian royal center.[487] The old metropole and the long tradition that it represented exerted its centrifugal force, drawing subsequent Assyrian kings back into its bosom. Tukultī-Ninurta had the power to erect a magnificent city, but not to preserve it against the allure of Aššur.

Middle Assyrian texts exalting the figure of the king are by and large the products of a scribal milieu that worked in service of the king himself. Their representation of the king should thus be understood as less than forthcoming about the king's dependence on others, or indeed about those historical moments when royal weakness resulted in episodes of irregular succession[488] or other difficulties. Even so, the image of the king as a solitary figure at the pinnacle of the Assyrian hierarchy is supported by the full range of our evidence. The king is of fundamental ideological and religious importance to the kingdom, he (normally) commands the allegiance of the grandees of the realm, he is the leader of the armed forces, he commissions and oversees the construction of major building projects, he dispenses justice,[489] and he

[487] Freydank 2009 attributes the abandonment of Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta to a combination of bad harvests connected to climactic conditions and political opposition to Tukultī-Ninurta himself.
[488] The Assyrian King List highlights two such episodes: one relates to the assassination of Tukultī-Ninurta I and results in the eventual usurpation of the royal line by a separate branch of the royal family (for which see Wiggermann 2006), and the other concerns Mutakkil-Nusku's seizure of the throne.
[489] See Lafont 2003: 526-527 for an overview of the king's role in dispensing justice.

oversees a vast state economy. Managing this jumble of jurisdictions was the task of government.

4.2.2 Government

In line with the comment attributed to Louis XIV that he was the state (*l'état, c'est moi*), the Middle Assyrian polity was constructed around the figure of the king. From tax collection and warfare to infrastructure and agricultural planning,[490] the entire machinery of state converged on him. He enjoyed direct control over extensive tracts of land, over livestock, and over various other resources. He also had rights to the labor of many of his subjects, and could dispose of the spoils of war when success on the battlefield filled the royal coffers. The administration of these affairs was divided among many royal agents. Most of the day-to-day work involved overseeing the management and exploitation of the king's resources. This was conducted through the *ekallu* (palace), which functioned as an administrative center. Although there were many palaces spread throughout the Assyrian realm, in Middle Assyrian administrative texts they feature in an institutional sense as branches of a single governing structure.[491]

[490] Exemplified by the extensive evidence of granaries (*karmu*) associated with the governing authorities, for which see Faist and Llop 2012: 20-25, who conclude on page 25 that "the official character of this installation seems undeniable."

[491] This dynamic has been described by Machinist 1982: 84 in the context of provincial palaces: "*ekallu* described both the physical complex in which the administration resided (= 'the palace') and, by extension, the administration itself and its different functions (= 'the Palace'). Among these functions should be included: maintaining order in the province; overseeing agricultural production there-a task which involved the supervision of Assyrian and captive workers; and ensuring a regular supply of taxes in kind and, not occasionally, in personnel

As the key nodes in Assyrian government, palaces appear in major and minor urban centers alike.[492] The palace managed local affairs and integrated the territory that it administered into the broader network of Assyrian governance. In this capacity, palaces fed and housed travelling officials.[493] They also supplied royal agents upon demand. The palace of the small town of Amasaki is, for instance, documented issuing large disbursements of grain to different royal agents (*qēpu ša šarri*).[494] To facilitate the flow of information, people, and goods through the kingdom, there developed both a system for the care and support of official travelers[495] and widespread standardization. There was a particularly Middle Assyrian cuneiform ductus, which facilitated recordkeeping and communication between officials in the employ of the state apparatus.[496] Middle Assyrian settlements are themselves distinguished by the presence of a distinct ceramic assemblage, which is uniform from the westernmost reaches of Assyrian expansion to the Assyrian heartland along the Tigris.[497] Clay vessels were fashioned locally according to precise specifications for use by the palace, expediting the flow and distribution of goods according to standard weights and measures. Because Middle Assyrian

to the heartland centers, both palace and temple. Toward such ends, the provincial *ekallātu,* like their Assur model, served as repositories for grain, implements, and animals, as the sites of archives and weight standards."

[492] Including the provincial town of Shibanibe, for which see Finkelstein 1953. Text 30: 2-3 in Finkelstein 1953: 130, for instance, refers to the *karê ša ekallim* (grain-heap of the palace).

[493] Many of the texts from Ḫarbe concern the issuing of supplies to officials, among them royal eunuchs, and even to foreign envoys from as far afield as Egypt. See Jakob 2009 for this corpus.

[494] See VAT 8997, edited as text 35 in Postgate 1988: 71-72.

[495] For which see Faist 2006.

[496] Postgate 2014: 57. See also Cancik-Kirschbaum 2012b: 26-29.

[497] As per Pfälzner 1995: 259-260, Pfälzner 1997, and Duistermaat 2008: 469-470. Cf. Tenu 2013.

government is centered so thoroughly on palaces, it has been suggested that intensive control over territory did not exceed a radius of 75 kilometers beyond any given settlement.[498]

The extension of Assyrian government beyond the city of Aššur entailed the operation of palaces in settlements that could support them. This is conveyed in an inscription of Tiglath-Pileser I that takes credit for the restoration of palaces following a period of weakness:

> *ekallāte šubat šarrūti ša māḫāzāni rabûte ša šiddi mātīya gabbe ša ištu tarṣi abēya ina šanāte dannāte umdašširāma ēnaḫāma i'abtā ēpuš ušeklil dūrāne mātīya anšūte akšer epinnē ina napḫar māt Aššur gabbe ušerkis u tabka ša uṭṭāte ana ša abēya lū ūter lū atbuk sugullāt sisê alpē imērē ša ina tukulti Aššur bēlīya ina mātāte ša abēlūšināti kišitti qātīya ša alqâ akṣur*
>
> I completely (re)built the palaces, royal residences of the great towns throughout the entirety of my land, which from the time of my fathers had been abandoned, enfeebled, and destroyed in years of hardship. I repaired the weakened fortifications of my land. I set plows to work in all the land of Aššur and I stored up a store of grain greater than that of my fathers. I formed herds of horses, oxen, and donkeys, which I seized with the support of Aššur, my lord, as the spoils of my hands in the lands that I rule.[499]

[498] See Brown 2014: 93-95 for this figure with corresponding analysis. See also the argument that the Middle Assyrian polity was a "network empire" in Liverani 1988: 86 and 90, and its echo in Tenu 2009: 236-237. Cf. the conclusion of Düring 2015b: 307 and 311, who speaks instead of a "patchwork empire" with differentiated modes of control for different territories.

[499] A.0.87.1: vi 94-vii 4 in Grayson 1991: 26. The same passage is cited in Postgate 2014: 10.

In addition to attesting to the presence of palaces in settlements across the kingdom, this passage links the restoration of these structures to agricultural management. It describes a sequence in which a functioning palace with adequate protections enables the successful practice of agriculture and the keeping of livestock. A palace oversees the local economy and depends in turn on an agricultural base capable of sustaining its managerial work. It reproduces an aspirationally autarkic economic system, meeting its own needs by itself and feeding additional resources to the royal center. This same sequence characterizes the establishment of Assyrian control to the West. Assyria's westward expansion in the 14th and especially in the 13th centuries is characterized by the construction of administrative centers with an accompanying agricultural hinterland.[500] These centers allowed the cultivation of new lands and the projection of control over additional territory. They also supplemented the state's resource base by contributing their agricultural surpluses and manpower to those at the disposal of the royal authorities. In this way, the Assyrian king fulfilled his obligation to expand his land – the land of Aššur.

Only Assyrian settlements of a certain rank had a palace. Beneath them in the hierarchically organized administrative system there was a rural landscape full of villages and

[500] In the words of Cancik-Kirschbaum 2014a: 108: "from the very beginning, the kings of Assyria obviously wanted to establish a regular, hierarchically structured network of settlements as a backbone of their imperial program. The imperial landscape is by no means simply the result of a more or less 'natural' evolution; on the contrary, it is to a certain degree shaped by deliberate actions of the Assyrian kings."

hamlets. These smaller places were accountable to the palaces they helped support.[501] In the West, minor agricultural outposts existed in a different form than in the lands along the Tigris. Archaeological research in the western frontiers of Assyrian expansion along the Ḫabur and Balikh rivers indicates widespread depopulation and ruralization in the wake of their protracted conquest by Assyria.[502] These trends are surely attributable to decades of warfare and Assyrian practices of deportation. Whatever the source of depopulation in the West, it complicated the establishment of stable Assyrian control. The result was the construction of a network of *dunnu*s. These were fortified outposts that concentrated a small agricultural population in a single place, enabling the authorities both to exercise control over this population and to intensify agricultural production and the extraction of surpluses.[503] Additionally, *dunnu*s served

[501] On the diversity of Middle Assyrian settlement patterns across time and space, see the conclusion of Lyon 2000: 105: "Other portions of northern Mesopotamia incorporated into the Assyrian state, each potentially having different agricultural potential, population densities, different tactical uses, proximities to other resources, and even increasingly greater or shorter distances from the Assyrian core, may have distinct settlement histories and structures. Future research could contrast source areas (Assyrian heartland) and target areas, but also the different environmental and historical structures of various target areas (Balikh, Khabur Basin, Lower Khabur, North Jazira, Middle Euphrates, Tigris, etc.) incorporated in the Middle Assyrian state in order to achieve a fuller picture of the late second millennium in particular and the interplay of environmental and historical factors in general."

[502] On the Balikh, see for instance Lyon 2000: 104: "Middle Assyrian expansion seems to have followed a period of decline marked by the decline and eventual abandonment of large settlements… At present we can only speculate about the destructive effects of Middle Assyrian aggression in creating the apparent power vacuum. In this case, abandonment of the region could have been hastened by the policy of deportation, the destruction of villages, pestilence, and the general ravages of war." On the Upper Ḫabur, see for instance Koliński 2014: 186: "the number of intensively used Middle Assyrian sites is much lower than during the Mittani period (only four in comparison to 30 intensively or very intensively used Mittani sites) and the entire settlement pattern seems to be much more dispersed and less dense than before."

[503] On the etymology of the term *dunnu*, see Cancik-Kirschbaum 2014a: 111: "The term *dunnu* is generally understood as referring to a type of small-scale fortified settlement as indicated by (a) its semantic field based on the root **dnn* 'to be strong' and (b) the descriptions connected to the more or less synonymous term *dimtu*, which is preponderant in the Nuzi-texts." See Radner 2004: 69-71 for the argument that *dunnu*s were designed to improve the resource base of the Middle Assyrian state through central planning, and Düring 2015a for an overview of the Middle Assyrian *dunnu* as an institution.

as Assyrian strongholds in often hostile regions. The projection of Assyrian power is built into the names of some *dunnu*s, as in *Dunni Aššur* (the *dunnu* of Aššur), which was located at the western fringe of the Middle Assyrian realm.[504]

As the involvement of Middle Assyrian authorities in agriculture exemplifies, the king's agents played a prominent role in the economic life of the kingdom. The government was involved in everything from the cultivation, storage, and processing of agricultural products to the production and distribution of finished goods. Local authorities supplied labor in the form of harvesters,[505] sometimes issuing them the necessary tools,[506] and they collected and stored agricultural surpluses,[507] redistributing them as necessary. In Dūr-Katlimmu, the major Middle Assyrian settlement in the West, a substantial body of texts relates to the management of agricultural operations by the local administration. These texts measure and record harvests by field, as well as registering the proportion of the harvest that is allocated to higher authorities and officials, reserved for seed, fed to livestock, or distributed as rations.[508] An analogous body of texts from Dūr-Katlimmu documents the management of a vast livestock operation. The

[504] On the location of *Dunni Aššur* between the Balikh and the Euphrates, see Luciani 2001; see also Wiggermann 2000: 172 and Llop 2002 for the possibility that *Dunni Aššur* is Tell Sabi Abyad. Wiggermann 2010: 27 concludes that *Dunni Aššur* is not identical with Tell Sabi Abyad.
[505] VAT 9027 is, for example, an administrative note that includes a record of how many harvesters (*īṣidū*) were to be delivered by individuals. The total adds up to more than two-hundred harvesters. For an edition of this text, see text 56 in Postgate 1988: 136-140.
[506] A total of 434 sickles are distributed to agricultural overseers in text T 96-16 (and its duplicate T 96-17) from Tell Sabi Abyad. See Wiggermann 2000: 188 for analysis, and page 207 for editions of the text (Texts 6 and 7).
[507] For storage of grain in official installations, see Faist and Llop 2012: 19-27.
[508] See Röllig 2008: 104-184 for the relevant texts, and pages 19-28 for analysis.

authorities kept meticulous records of cattle, donkeys, sheep, and goats, classifying individual animals by age, sex, and other characteristics. They document, moreover, the harvesting of byproducts from these animals in the form of wool, hair, and hides.[509] Still other texts speak to what happened to some of these byproducts. Two texts from Dūr-Katlimmu record the distribution of specific quantities of wool to individual, named female weavers, for the manufacture of a designated number of textiles of various kinds.[510] At the small site of Atmannu near Aššur, texts document the management of flocks of sheep and goats. In these texts, there are records of animals slaughtered to feed the king and his entourage when they were in the area.[511] There are also records of wool being distributed to weavers for the manufacture of clothes for other workers in state service.[512] The quantities of wool accumulated and distributed through the government could be immense. One text registers the delivery of about six and a half tons of wool to recipients at Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta.[513]

Official involvement in productive processes extends to the conversion of all sorts of raw materials into finished articles. Local authorities sometimes distributed raw materials to people in the expectation that finished goods would be delivered in return. Such work-

[509] See Röllig 2008: 29-103 for the relevant texts, and pages 5-17 for analysis. The herds are sometimes identified as palace herds, as in text 2: 20 on page 30, which refers to a *šugullu ša ekallim* (palace herd).
[510] Texts 47 and 48 in Salah 2014: 203-210.
[511] For instance in text 8 in Ismail and Postgate 2008: 161.
[512] In texts 17 and 18 in Ismail and Postgate 2008: 168, the chief of the weavers receives wool *ana lubulte ša šiluḫli* (for the clothing of the *šiluḫlu*s); in text 24T: 14-15 on pages 175-176, wool is issued *ana lubulte ša ṣābē nairâyē* (for the clothing of the Nairieans). Text 47: 23 in Salah 2014: 203-208 from Dūr-Katlimmu documents the issuing of wool *ana lubulte ša amāt ekallim* (for the clothing of the female slaves of the palace).
[513] As calculated by Postgate 2014: 9 on the basis of MARV 1.27 (Freydank 1976).

assignments were known by the term *iškāru* and are attested in the context of wool,[514] leather, grain, wood, stone, aromatics, spices, sesame, and other resources.[515] An analogous process is attested as fulfillment of the *ilku* obligation.[516] One text from Aššur records the contribution of materials to people for the manufacture of a predetermined number of bows. The text repeats the same formula with varying names and quantities, as in the following example stating the purpose of the materials: *ana* 32 *qašāti ša qāt šarri* 32 *qašāti ša ilki ša muḫḫi Adad-šar mār Ištar-šuma-ēriš* ([these materials are] for 32 bows that are destined for the king, 32 *ilku* bows that are incumbent upon Adad-šar son of Ištar-šuma-ēriš).[517] In this way, weapons were delivered to the government by private subjects. Trade was another field of economic endeavor in which the government was directly involved. Indeed, trade beyond the borders of the kingdom was conducted largely through the institution of the palace, securing valuable

[514] Texts from both Dūr-Katlimmu and Atmannu describe certain deliveries of wool as the *iškāru ša amāt ekallim* (the work assignment of the slave-women of the palace). For Dūr-Katlimmu, see text 48: 20 in Salah 2014: 208-210. For Atmannu, see text 20: 7-10 in Ismail and Postgate 2008: 170-171, which describes a quantity of wool as being *ana iškāre ša amāt ekallim tadna* (issued for the work-assignment of the slave-women of the palace).
[515] See Postgate 2010: 21-26 for an overview of the *iškāru* system with references for each of the different types of resources attested in the context of *iškāru*.
[516] The *ilku* is discussed in section 4.3.2.
[517] Ass.2001.D-2218: 17-19 in Frahm 2002: 75-78. Frahm 2002: 80 reads this and parallel passages in the text as referring to two sets of 32 bows, one for the king and one for the *ilku*. Every repetitive formula in the text is written out in full and without use of scribal shortcuts, so that the repetition of the number of bows does not strike me as referencing two different sets of bows but rather as a specification both of their destination and the context of their delivery: they are 32 bows for the king, 32 bows in fulfillment of the *ilku* obligation. 32 bows, not 64. Another example of the delivery of military equipment as fulfillment of *ilku* service is MARV 5.47: 1-3, edited as text 89 in Prechel and Freydank 2014: 105-106, which records the receipt of 513 standardized arrowheads as *ilku*.

resources like precious metals.[518] From grain to gold, the government was involved in the economy at all levels and in many capacities.

Government involvement in economic activity is exemplified by wool. This resource illustrates the extent to which the cycle of production could begin and end with the authorities. In the words of J.N. Postgate, "in the thirteenth century the Assyrian state controlled the production of textiles from the birth of the lamb, via the weavers in the palace workshops right through to the finished standardized garments for the local palace workforce."[519] Sheep owned by the authorities were sheared by workers who labored for the authorities. The wool was then collected by the authorities and issued to weavers in service of the authorities. These weavers manufactured textiles for the authorities that were then distributed by the authorities. For those who were subject to the Middle Assyrian government, there was not much that escaped the long arm of the state. It is of course true that the textual record we have is the product of official accounting and thus documents the public economy. It highlights the economic role of the authorities while leaving little to no direct trace of any private economy. Even so, in the areas where the administration operated it is difficult to see how it could have been anything other than the major economic force.[520] It simply managed too much of the workforce and its output for it to be otherwise. This is not to say that there was no private economy: there was.

[518] Faist 2001: 80-96.
[519] Postgate 2010: 29.
[520] For an overview of the state economy as a whole, see Jakob 2003: Chapter 1.4, pages 24-53.

But where official control was strong, it was the government that dictated the rhythms of economic life.

Not all extractive processes were designed simply to increase the supply of resources to the government. One contribution in particular served a primarily symbolic purpose. This was the *ginā'u* offering.[521] Every year, each of the major provinces of the kingdom was obliged to deliver a relatively small quantity of cereals, honey, fruit, and sesame to the Aššur temple.[522] There, a special agency worked to convert these offerings into "a neat 400 loaves of bread with accompanying beer, honey, oil, and fruit."[523] By ensuring the participation of every part of the kingdom in the daily operations of the Aššur temple, the *ginā'u* offering communicated the unity of the land of Aššur in its subjection to the god Aššur. In the words of Stefan Maul,

> *What really mattered was that the basic care of the god was carried out by all parts of the Assyrian state jointly. Far more important than the need to amass the natural produce required for the regular offerings appears to have been that commodities from the entire country ended up on the table of the gods. God and country thus bear the*

[521] This has been noted by numerous scholars. See for instance Pongratz-Leisten 2015: 380: "The *ginā'u* offerings supplied by the provinces represent only very basic provisions for the Aššur temple, and their purpose appears to have been primarily symbolic." See also Maul 2017: 344: "Had only practical concerns mattered, the daily provisions of Assur and the other gods residing in his temple could probably have been covered easily by royal domains or temple estates or could have been defrayed completely by the hinterland of the capital city. But the scrupulous documentation left by the Assur temple's administrator of offerings clearly shows that exactly this was not intended."

[522] For a comprehensive study of the practical operation of the *ginā'u* offering and its broader historical context, see Gauthier 2016. For a more concise overview, see Maul 2013.

[523] Gauthier 2016: 711.

*same name with a very good reason: the land Ashur (*māt Aššur*) with all of its individual parts feeds the god, who himself embodies the land.*[524]

In practical terms, it was the government's extensive involvement in the economy that ensured the integration of the Middle Assyrian kingdom's disparate parts into a single administrative whole. The *ginā'u* was the symbolic equivalent, uniting the kingdom's provinces under the aegis of Aššur.

4.3 The Social Framework

Wer baute das siebentorige Theben?

In den Büchern stehen die Namen von Königen.

Haben die Könige die Felsbrocken herbeigeschleppt?

Who built Thebes of the seven gates?

In the books you will find the names of kings.

Did the kings haul up the lumps of rock?

- *Bertolt Brecht, Fragen eines lesenden Arbeiters*[525]

[524] Maul 2017: 344. This reading is analogous to that of Pongratz-Leisten 2015: 380-381 and Postgate 1992: 252: "the significant point is that the contributors represent the constituent parts of Assyria proper: they do not include client kingdoms or other marginally autonomous areas. This is understandable: a central shrine embodies a territory's communal identity and, provided some measure of autonomy was maintained, any state would have its own symbolic centre in the shape of its traditional god, and could not serve two masters. Incorporation into Assyria meant participating in the cult of its god; it need not have meant abandoning the worship of the local deity, but it would have affected the significance of that cult as a political statement."

[525] Brecht 2006: 62-63.

4.3.1 The Ruling Class

To run his kingdom, the king depended on the support of a large body of officials. These people occupied an intermediate position between the king and his many subjects, staffing the state apparatus and implementing Assyrian rule. The centrality of this staff to the functioning of Assyrian government is recognized in the Middle Assyrian coronation ritual, which involves the very highest levels of the official hierarchy in the quintessential ceremony of kingship.[526] Two different groups of officials participate in this ritual, namely the royal eunuchs and the grandees (*rabûtu*). The royal eunuchs represent the most intimate of the king's associates, operating within his private household and sometimes executing various commissions on his behalf.[527] Such eunuchs could also be appointed to senior positions like governor. Grandees too were entrusted with every manner of high office. Many of the grandees were themselves members of the extended royal family,[528] so that the highest level of the Assyrian government can be regarded as an extension of the king's household. It is usually grandees who serve as provincial governors and military commanders, and it is their subordinates who execute the bulk of the kingdom's administrative work.

[526] As in their blessing of the king's rule and in the ceremony confirming their tenure of their offices, for which see lines ii 28-36 and iii 7-14 in Parpola 2017: 16-17.
[527] See Jakob 2003: 82-92 for an overview and analysis of the Middle Assyrian evidence of royal eunuchs. Unfortunately, there is no real evidence indicating the source of Middle Assyrian eunuchs. We don't know how they were chosen and from which social circles they were taken, when they were castrated, how they were raised, etc.
[528] On this issue see Cancik-Kirschbaum 1999.

There was a superstratum of wealthy and well-connected families from which the king selected his leading officials. These families could belong to the established aristocracy of Aššur and its environs, or be coopted from the upper social strata of conquered territories. They were characterized by their prosperity, which was manifest in their ownership or rights to the usufruct of extensive tracts of cultivated land. Members of these families appear to have intermarried and produced the *rabûtu* (grandees) of the realm.[529] The heads of such families governed their own estates, reproducing on a smaller scale the operation of Middle Assyrian government. They ran their own domestic economies,[530] communicated with subordinates,[531] supervised production through their own *iškāru* systems,[532] and conducted their own trade.[533] Members of this landholding class could accumulate great wealth. In one inheritance text, a father makes a bequest to his daughter that includes eight female slaves, a plough, an ox, a donkey, a house, a plot of land, furniture, and domestic utensils, including various bronze

[529] As Machinist 1982: 93 describes them, these were "large, extended families of wealth, holding estates and involved in a web of commercial relations, who have ties with, if they are not actually part, of the government." See also Faist 2010: 17.

[530] Mühl 2015: 52: notes the discovery in Tell Hanas of an inscribed potsherd bearing the name of an official "who appears as *līmu, ša rēš šarre, mešennu* of Ashur, *bēl pāḫete* and *qēpu* of Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta in the reign of Tukultī-Ninurta I (1233-1197 BC)." This inscribed potsherd likely indicates a proprietary relationship with the vessel and its contents, analogous to the patterns observed in the context of the royal palace (marking things as *ša ekallim*). In this case the person is a eunuch, but the premise of autonomous households stands.

[531] See Wilhelm 1997 for a private letter from a subordinate reporting to his boss on the condition of his property and estate, including questions of agricultural management.

[532] For evidence of this see the discussion of Postgate 2010: 23 and Faist 2001: 99, which Postgate cites.

[533] Faist 2001: 96-108 (§5.2) documents the commercial activities of large, private households.

pieces.[534] The father also has sons, who are his principal heirs.[535] As such, this bequest must represent only a small fraction of the father's total wealth, offering but a glimpse of the resources available to those at the higher end of Assyrian society.

The estates of grandees could be made or enlarged through service to the crown. Such service was often prebendary in nature, so that officeholders were permitted to collect the revenue from lands associated with their office. One of the choice appointments for a grandee was the position of provincial governor. In the course of the 14th and 13th centuries, a system of provinces (the *pāḫutu*) developed to govern the kingdom's increasingly expansive domains.[536] These provinces replicated the hierarchical structure of the kingdom. Just as the king ruled the kingdom on behalf of Aššur, so too did the provincial governors (the *bēl pāḫete*) rule their provinces on behalf of the king.[537] In two cases, provinces were so closely identified with their governors that they took their name – though in both cases the governors were powerful members of the royal family.[538] Because governors replicated the royal model of government,

[534] TR 2037 from Tell al Rimah in Postgate 1979: 89-91.
[535] TR 2037 concludes with the statement in lines 39-41 that *mimma annia Erīb-ili ana Takla-šemāt ittidin šumma mārū Takla-šemāt ibaššiū ilaqqiū šumma lâššu* [x x] *mārū Erīb-ili* [… (all this Erīb-ili has given to Takla-šemāt. If Takla-šemāt has sons, they will inherit; if there are none [x x] the sons of Erīb-ili…). Although the end of the text is broken, the implication is that Erīb-ili has sons, to which the bequest will revert after Takla-šemāt's death unless she has children of her own.
[536] For an overview of the relevant evidence concerning the early development of the Assyrian provincial system, see Llop 2011.
[537] It bears noting in this regard that *pāḫutu*, the term for a province, derives etymologically from *pūḫu*, a word that denotes the sense of "substitute" or "replacement". Provincial authority can thus be thought of as a substitute for royal authority, and the authority of a governor as a substitute for the authority of a king.
[538] As per Jakob 2003: 14, footnote 121, and Llop 2012: 96. They are the provinces of Aššur-iddin (*pāḫutu ša Aššur-iddin*) and Ilī-padâ' (*pāḫutu ša Ilī-padâ*).

they were able to enrich themselves by extracting wealth from their fiefdoms over and above the share claimed by the king himself. Any propensity for unsustainable extractive practices was counteracted by long (and possibly indeterminate) terms of office that encouraged planning for the long-term; in some cases, tenure of an office could be passed down to the officeholder's descendants, establishing a hereditary principle in state service.[539] In the underdeveloped West, the policy of establishing *dunnu*s appears to have been another opportunity for grandees to increase their landholdings by founding new estates. Many *dunnu*s are named after individuals, who are in most cases likely the original founders and proprietors of these settlements.[540] This connection is evident in a text involving an upper-class woman from the *dunnu* of Asusīya, who also happens to be the daughter of a man named Asusīya; it is clear in this case that she is the daughter of the founder and proprietor of the *dunnu*.[541]

There was little effective oversight of officials, and what little there was declined in proportion to the distance of the officials from the royal center.[542] Accordingly, the potential for abuse of power was great. Officials at various levels of the governing hierarchy could exploit

[539] This innovation is noted by Faist 2010: 21.
[540] See Koliński 2015: 22-24. For a list of known *dunnu*s (compiled before the discovery of much new evidence and thus not inclusive of all data), see Nashef 1982: 83-87. Most are named after individuals.
[541] See VAT 9003: 4-6, edited as text 2 in Postgate 1988: 3-4. Wiggermann 2000: 172 notes that Tell Sabi Abyad was likewise the inherited property of a single individual: "Sabi Abyad was a *dunnu,* a fortified agricultural production centre, owned by the 'grand vizier' and 'king of Ḫanigalbat' Ili-pada, and probably by his father Aššur-iddin before him."
[542] Brown 2013: 110 observes that "some officials, in particular those farther away from the Assyrian heartland (e.g., Syria west of the wadi Jaghjagh, the Upper Tigris basin), had a great deal of autonomy, apart from the *ginā'u* and certain well-defined obligations to the central king, such as provisioning foreign envoys."

their position to make improper use of state resources or to otherwise deprive the royal center of its due. An unusual text records a declaration made by an official named Aššur-iddin in the presence of the king. Aššur-iddin denies several possible abuses before avowing that *šumma Aššur-iddin Šubrê Nairāyē ū Katmuḫāyē iltapar ištasīšunu epinnušu ukta''ilū tēlīt ebūršunu ētakal Aššur-iddin napšātu ša šarri bēlīšu izziar* (if Aššur-iddin has given orders to the Subareans, Nairiaeans, or Katmuḫaeans, or he has summoned them, or they have used his ploughs, or he has consumed the tax on their harvest, then Aššur-iddin has rejected the life of the king, his lord!).[543] Aššur-iddin proclaims his innocence of the listed set of offenses, and frames them as a rejection of the king himself. For the present purposes, the guilt or innocence of Aššur-iddin is immaterial: the important takeaway is that corruption was conceivable, that it was regarded as reprehensible, and that concerns about it could be entertained by the king himself. In another unfortunately fragmentary text, a newly appointed overseer of towns in the district of Kurda is made to swear an oath and entrusted with resolving some sort a problem in his jurisdiction.[544] It seems that this problem had come to the king's attention and that he wanted his official to deal with it in a particular way. Sometimes officials had to account for their actions or perform specific tasks. In most of the textual record, however, they appear to

[543] A. 2994: 15-25 in Brinkman and Donbaz 1985: 85. The form **ištasīšunu* is reconstructed, on which see Brinkman and Donbaz's note on page 86. I prefer *ištasi* to *iltasī* in keeping with the writing *áš-si-šu-nu* in line 10.
[544] The text is MARV 8.76. The king is Tukultī-Ninurta and the official is the *rab ālāne ša āl Kurda* (the chief of the towns of the city of Kurda) – in other words, the overseer of Kurda's satellite towns and villages. Kurda is identified as a *ḫalzu* (an administrative district) later in the text. For the most recent edition of the text, see Freydank 2017: 182-183; Freydank also offers an analysis of the text.

go about their business freely, acting as the chief authorities in their areas of jurisdiction and seeing to it that they fulfilled their obligations while doing well for themselves.[545] This spirit is captured by the instructions of one official who writes to his underling that he is on his way to a *dunnu*, where he is expecting visitors.[546] He writes, *billu lū ma'd liblulū mimma lâššu lā tappalānni* (let the *billu*-beer be plentiful! Let them prepare it, and do not answer me that there isn't any!).[547] It's the official's life for him.

One official in the Middle Assyrian ruling class came to occupy a special position. This was the *sukkallu rabi'u* (grand vizier), who for most of the 13th century also appears to have borne the title *šar māt Ḫanigalbat* (king of the land of Ḫanigalbat). As Assyria expanded westward, extensive new territories were incorporated into the kingdom, many of them in an area known in Assyrian sources as Ḫanigalbat.[548] Governing these lands became the

[545] As per the rhetorical question of Brown 2013: 109: "But what definite duties did district and regional administrators have to the ruler, apart from supplying labor from conquered peoples and the relatively small *ginā'u* to the state authorities in Aššur? At the current state of knowledge, the answer appears to be relatively little."

[546] The official in question is Ninu'āyu, likely one and the same as the brother of the grand vizier and *šar māt Ḫanigalbat* Ilī-padâ, as per the suggestion of Wiggermann 2000: 172, footnote 2.

[547] Text 2: 8-12 in Güterbock 1958: 88. The word *dunnu* is preceded by URU, the determinative sign for a city, so that this could conceivably be a reference to a town by that name. More likely, however, is that the correspondents had a particular *dunnu* in mind that was known to both of them and required no further specification. In this context, the determinative URU does not need to be understood as anything more than a marker for place, and indeed, the determinative often precedes the names of specific *dunnu*s, too. Güterbock 1958: 87 and Wiggermann 2000: 173, footnote 4 reach the same conclusion about the use of the term *dunnu* in this text, though they have different ideas about which *dunnu* is intended. See Nashef 1982: 83-87 for attestations of Middle Assyrian place names that include the term *dunnu*, and page 84 for attestations of places called simply *dunnu*. These attestations do not controvert the notion that *dunnu* by itself serves as an abbreviated form for a *dunnu* that is known to the authors and readers of the text in which it appears.

[548] Ḫanigalbat is the Assyrian designation for the kingdom of Mittani, whose former lands it had conquered. The title *šar māt Ḫanigalbat* (king of the land of Ḫanigalbat) might therefore have originated in a desire to project some level of institutional continuity to the former subjects and servants of the Mittanian polity.

responsibility of the *sukkallu rabi'u*, whose office was occupied in hereditary succession over at least four generations. An indication of the importance of this office beyond the royal title associated with it is the fact that it was occupied by a parallel branch of the royal family.[549] The first known *šar māt Ḫanigalbat* is the son of king Adad-nārārī I, and brother to Adad-nārārī's successor Shalmaneser. Despite his royal title, the *sukkallu rabi'u* was subordinate to the Assyrian king and appears to have spent time in Aššur as well as in various places under his own jurisdiction.[550] When it came to the administration of his own affairs, the *sukkallu rabi'u* seems to have been left well alone. This is illustrated by a colorful example in a text from Tell Sabi Abyad, a *dunnu* in the far West of the Assyrian realm that was owned by the *sukkallu rabi'u* himself. In that text, a widow makes a journey of about 200 kilometers to see the *sukkallu rabi'u* in person and intercedes with him directly. She offers him an uncastrated male slave in the hope that this will convince him to let her keep her deceased husband's slaves for herself.[551] More prosaically, the administrative texts from Tell Sabi Abyad, Ḫarbe, and Dūr-Katlimmu speak to the extensive power of local authorities in the West, even if the *sukkallu rabi'u* who oversaw these authorities ultimately enjoyed his position in the name of the Assyrian king.

[549] On the occupation of this office by a branch of the Assyrian royal family, see Cancik-Kirschbaum 1999: 19-20 and Fales 2014: 224-229. See Fales 2014: 227 for a table documenting the genealogical relationship between the principal branch of the Assyrian royal family and that of the Assyrian kings of Ḫanigalbat. See Shibata 2015: 239-240 for the suggestion that the dynasty of grand viziers continued to intermarry with the main branch of the royal family.
[550] As noted by Wiggermann 2000: 173.
[551] The relevant text is the still unpublished T 97-2. Its contents are reported by Wiggermann 2010: 38.

One of the implications of this model of administrative division is that local grandees could build up extensive personal patronage networks and wealth. This carried with it the potential for the more ambitious and seditious among them to cultivate an independent power base from which to challenge the authority of the king.[552] The same dynamic is illustrated at a lower level in the administrative hierarchy by a letter between the *sukkallu rabi'u* Ilī-padâ and an underling in Tell Sabi Abyad. While Ilī-padâ is in Aššur to participate in the burial of Tukultī-Ninurta and in the coronation of his successor, conflict breaks out between officials in his domain.[553] In the absence of a higher authority, these officials compete in a way that impedes the proper functioning of the administrative hierarchy. In the same way, and in accordance with the same "when the cat's away, the mice will play" principle of government, distance from the king could embolden officials to overstep their authority and pursue their own ends.[554] This prospect is most pronounced in the case of the *sukkallu rabi'u*'s control over a vast and distant territory. It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that a member of the parallel royal line of the *sukkallu rabi'u*s usurped the throne in the beginning of the 12th century. Wisely, the new royal line abolished the association of the office of *sukkallu rabi'u* with the title King of Ḫanigalbat,

[552] Brown 2013: 110 makes this point: "The accrual of large amounts of basic staples within their areas of responsibility, in principle perhaps reserved for 'official' state business such as the provisioning of the military during campaigns, would permit any official desiring to enjoy his autonomy to build up a local force of dependents accountable more to him than any distant power."

[553] The pertinent letter is T 02-32, for which see Wiggermann 2006: 94 and footnote 3; figure 141 is a copy of the tablet.

[554] This dynamic is again captured by Brown 2013: 112: "far from a hypercentralized administrative structure, the Middle Assyrian state was much looser, with land-holdings of sufficient size to permit subordinates to cause trouble to their superiors (e.g., by withholding supplies and personnel)."

which is never attested again.[555] The new kings had firsthand knowledge of the fact that it was not in their interests for any subordinate to accumulate too much power.

4.3.2 Small Landholders and the Slippery Slope

In Middle Assyrian society, possession of cultivable land was the basis of wealth and status.[556] A great deal of land was held by the king and the rest of the ruling class, who collectively hoarded most of the available wealth and status. There were, however, others with a stake in land. Evidence of private land tenure patterns is meager for most of the kingdom, but there are numerous texts that demonstrate the existence of a sizable class of minor landholding farmers in the region around Aššur.[557] Because access to land was the basis of wealth, it was also the basis of taxation.[558] Landholders were obliged to contribute to government in various ways. While there is not much concrete evidence concerning material taxation of landholders, texts from Tell Sabi Abyad indicate that the agricultural output of farmers could be taxed at a rate of about fifty percent.[559] Better documented is the obligation to perform *ilku* service. The

[555] Llop 2012: 96.
[556] See Crone 2003: 28-31 for a discussion of the place of land in pre-industrial societies.
[557] Postgate 2014: 31. The principles of land tenure could vary from outright ownership by individuals to communal title in the context of a village. For more on Middle Assyrian land tenure, see Postgate 1971 and 1982: 308-310.
[558] This is equally true of contemporaneous societies in the immediate environs of Assyria. As van Driel 2000: 277 argues: "In Nuzi, and no doubt in the whole Mitanni/Ḫanigalbat dominated world, Alalaḫ included, we can assume a way of land holding which is directly related to the military structure on which society rests... It is an answer to technical possibilities, which, if successful, finds expression in a social structure of which land holding is inevitably the most important aspect in an agrarian society." Much the same conclusion is reached in von Dassow 2008: 349-356, building on an exhaustive study of the sources.
[559] Wiggermann 2000: 194 – though a share of this output was surely redistributed to them as rations. Some of the free families owned up to four slaves, suggesting that they were not (or not yet) among the poorest of the free folk.

ilku involves periodic military or labor service for the authorities.[560] Sometimes, it is discharged through the contribution of finished goods, in which case the labor involved likely is the *ilku*.[561] The precise mechanics of how *ilku* service was levied or transmitted to new generations remains unclear.[562] For those who preferred not to perform *ilku* service themselves, it was possible to hire others to do so on their behalf.[563] This was presumably the favored approach of wealthier landholders. In any case, the number of workers that could be recruited by the state within the framework of the *ilku* was significant. In one text from Kār-tukultī-Ninurta, for instance, a total of 1,694 people are recorded in a single workers' roll, of which 1,432 are selected for labor.[564]

The *ilku* is also attested in regions distant from the Assyrian heartland. The population of farmers in the far western *dunnu* of Tell Sabi Abyad was expected to perform the *ilku*.[565] In Dūr-Katlimmu, lists record the distribution of rations to many dozens of individuals performing

[560] Postgate 2008: 84-85 notes that only a subset of those called up for *ilku* service performed military service. This is likely conditioned by individual fitness and need. In peaceful conditions there would have been little need for armed *ilku* service. In any case, the line between the two could be slim, as is suggested by the fact that the word *ṣābū* can denote both laborers and soldiers.
[561] As in Ass.2001.D-2218 in Frahm 2002: 75-78, where materials are delivered to individuals for the production of bows; this is presented in the context of *ilku* service. See also MARV 5.47, edited in Postgate 2014: 22, which records the delivery of 513 arrowheads in fulfillment of the *ilku*.
[562] For a recent overview of the problem, see Postgate 2014: 21-27. Compare also Postgate 1971: 517: "all 'normal' private land was granted to free men by the crown, to be held in direct line from father to son only, in return for the performance of *ilku* services" and Postgate 1982: 306-308.
[563] KAJ 307, edited in Postgate 2014: 23, is an example of a contract for the fulfillment of service obligations by a third party.
[564] See MARV 1.18, the relevant section of which is edited in Postgate 2014: 26-27.
[565] As indicated by the fact that they could be divided into groups of fifty under a *rab ḫanšē* (commander of fifty), like *ilku* workers elsewhere. See Wiggermann 2000: 194.

the *ilku*.[566] Helpfully, the texts from Dūr-Katlimmu individuate their entries. One list includes a man who is said to be blind, as well as a few women designated as *ḫarimtu*s (prostitutes).[567] Clearly, blind men would not be able to do everything that the sighted could. It is not clear what the explicit designation of women as prostitutes is intended to convey, but it is curious that these lists should include women at all, as there is no record of their having to perform *ilku* service. Perhaps these women were performing the service as substitutes for male relatives or ended up on these lists for other reasons. Be that as it may, the inclusion of markedly different sorts of people implies that *ilku* service could be structured in a way that optimized the use of available workers for the fulfillment of different tasks. It is possible that the *ilku* was imposed in some form throughout the realm. One text documents the issuing of palace grain *ana kurummat* 152 *ṣābē* ^{URU}*Ḫarallâyē* 60 ^{KUR}*Qumānâyē* 26 ^{KUR}*Muṣri'ē* 16 *bēlē perri ša maṣṣarti ša Libbi-āli ukallūni* (as rations for 152 servicemen from the city of Ḫarallu, 60 from the land of Qumānu, 26 from the land of Muṣru, 16 labor detachment managers, who held the shift of the Inner City).[568] Although the word *ilku* does not feature in this text, the workers are not qualified as deportees or prisoners. It seems, therefore, that they are fulfilling some sort of work obligation that is not directly conditioned by their subjection to the Assyrian authorities. The

[566] See texts 28 and 74-77 in Salah 2014.
[567] See text text 75: 14 in Salah 2014: 305-312 for the blind man; *ḫarimtu*s (prostitutes) are attested in texts 75 and 76. For a different reading of the term *ḫarimtu*, see Assante 1998.
[568] VAT 18012: 6-13, copied as text 12 in Freydank 1976 (MARV 1).

framework for such labor service must be something like the *ilku*, if not the *ilku* itself. Either way, the Assyrian authorities pursued extractive labor schemes for subjects everywhere.

This conclusion begs the question: how much autonomy did the small landholders of Assyria enjoy anyway? Work obligations meant that those who performed them had no real control over where they went or what they did. The perpetual performance of *ilku* service is built into one contract between Amurru-naṣir and his slave Iluma-iriba. Amurru-naṣir frees his female slave Asuat-Digla and permits her to marry Iluma-iriba. In return, *Asuat-Digla u līdānūša* [x] *ālāyû ša Amurru-naṣir u mārēšu šunu ilka ša ālāyûti ana Amurru-naṣir u mārēšu illukū u Amurru-naṣir u mārēšu Asuat-Digla u līdānīša ana amūti u urdūti lā iṣabbutū* (Asuat-Digla and her offspring [x] are the villagers of Amurru-naṣir and his sons. They will perform the *ilku* service of those with villager status for Amurru-naṣir and his sons, and Amurru-naṣir and his sons will not seize Asuat-Digla and her offspring as female or male slaves).[569] The offspring of Asuat-Digla may be free, but they will continue to owe their labor to Amurru-naṣir and his descendants in perpetuity. What kind of freedom is that? That state service could be undesirable is evident in the Middle Assyrian Laws, in which numerous offenses are punished by the imposition of precisely such service. This is expressed by the formula *šipar šarre eppaš* (he will perform the king's service).[570] The undesirability of state service is also reflected in the fact that there were institutionally regulated means of evading it by securing a substitute. Even

[569] KAJ 7, edited in Postgate 2014: 15.
[570] For instance in A ¶ 18 in Roth 1997: 159 and *passim* in Roth 1997: 153-194.

when a substitute was secured, this was no guarantee that state service had greater appeal to them than it did to those who hired them. In one text, a slave who was engaged to perform state service on someone else's behalf is arrested *ana lā alāki ša ḫurādi* (for not setting out with the army).[571] Only by hiring substitutes could one secure freedom from state service, and wealth was thus the key to personal autonomy. But for small landholders wealth was a fickle thing.

There is copious evidence of slippage down the social ladder. The prospect of immiseration for small landholders lurked at the doorstep. When landholders faced hard times – maybe because of a bad harvest, illness, family misfortune, unanticipated expenses, excessive taxation, or some other reason – there were few sources of credit, and what little credit there was came with onerous interest rates. Land was often the only valuable thing in a small landholder's possession, and was therefore frequently offered as security for credit. Over time, the pattern appears to have been unidirectional: small landholders ran into trouble, fell into debt, and ultimately lost their land, increasing the number of landless poor and accelerating the consolidation of large estates by upper-class families.[572] If they did not want to lose their land, or had no land left to lose, people could pledge their dependents. In a loan contract from Tell al

[571] The poorly preserved MARV 4.6, edited in Postgate 2014: 24-25. The punishment for this runaway is not recorded, but if the punitive measures recorded in the Middle Assyrian Laws are any indication, his fate will have been grim.

[572] This process is described by Renger 1995: 305-307 and Jas 2000: 256-258. For an example of a loan contracted with land as security, see the edition of KAJ 14 in Postgate 2014: 32, who concludes that "land pledge texts like this one show plots of agricultural land in villages, in danger of passing from their previous owners into the hands of certain Aššur-based families."

Rimah, a man surrenders his wife and children as security for some tin; the contract specifies that his relatives will be released when he pays back the tin – with interest, of course.[573] In a loan contract from Dunnu-ša-Uzibi, a man pledges his wife.[574] The practice of handing over dependents as security for loans even features in the Middle Assyrian Laws. A somewhat obscure paragraph appears to say that if the value of a pledged person is less than the value of a loan, the pledgeholder may whip the pledge, tear out their hair, or pierce or otherwise mutilate their ears.[575] Presumably, this is to compensate for the difference between the value of the pledge and the value of the loan. When a man had no land or dependents to pledge, and no obvious means of supporting himself, he could enter into an agreement to serve someone else. This was, essentially, indentured servitude. In an example from Aššur, a man voluntarily enters into a ten-year term of servitude in another man's house. For this, he receives room and board, as well as the promise of a wife. The contract specifies that when his term of service expires, the man will be allowed to leave with both his wife and his clothes.[576] Life for the small landholder was precarious, and the prospect of falling down the social ladder was all the more vertiginous for being so close at hand.

[573] TR. 3021 in Wiseman 1968: 183-184.
[574] T90, edited as text 8 in Radner 2004: 87-88.
[575] A ¶ 44 in Roth 1997: 170. This level of violence is not inconsistent with the tenor of the rest of the Middle Assyrian Laws. See also A ¶ 39, which regulates what happens when a girl who is held in pledge is married off by the pledgeholder.
[576] VS 19, edited in Postgate 1979: 93-94.

4.3.3 Les Misérables, or: What is a šiluḫlu?

At the bottom of the social hierarchy are slaves, whose degraded status and lack of personal autonomy is familiar from the Old Assyrian period.[577] In the Middle Assyrian period, slaves shared their place in the social hierarchy with a large body of people known as *šiluḫlu*s. The *šiluḫlu*s feature prominently in administrative texts, where they are documented in large numbers. They appear to have comprised a significant element of the rural labor force, working the land on behalf of prosperous landlords.[578] More than that, they belonged to their landlords in some form. As the Middle Assyrian laws make clear, *šiluḫlu*s were inherited like other property. A paragraph regulating the division of a father's estate between his sons prioritizes the heirs in descending order of age. By way of compensation, it grants the youngest son the privilege of getting first pick of the *šiluḫlu*s and the farm equipment: *ina eqle šiluḫlē mimma u mānaḫāte gabbe māru ṣeḫru ussaq* (the youngest son selects [first from among] whatever *šiluḫlu*s and any equipment there are in the field).[579] Not only is it possible to inherit *šiluḫlu*s, but they are treated as the consolation prize in the estates of the wealthy, being presented as equivalent to farm equipment. The process of inheriting *šiluḫlu*s appears to be documented in a

[577] VAT 8822: 2-10, edited as text 1 in Postgate 1988: 1-2, serves as a good example of this lack of autonomy: *iltēt šipartu damiqtu ša Aššur-aḫa-iddina mār Adad-šar-ilāni mār Aššur-išmânni ina muḫḫe Iāku-līmer mār Ḫarrāne mār Abna*-[…] *sinniltu annītu šulmānu abassu emmar šulmāššu ilaqqi* (one good female weaver, belonging to Aššur-aḫa-iddina, son of Adad-šar-ilāni, son of Aššur-išmânni, owed by Iāku-līmer, son of Ḫarrāne, son of Abna-[…]. This woman is a gift. He [Aššur-aḫa-iddina] will examine his [Iāku-līmer's] case and receive his gift.) Essentially, this text documents the payment of a female slave in exchange for services.

[578] For more on the *šiluḫlu*, see Fincke 1994, Wiggermann 2000: 174, and Jakob 2003: 39-41. On the etymology of the term, see Fincke 1994: 341-342.

[579] B ¶ 1 in Roth 1997: 176. See also O ¶ 3 on page 191.

text written after the death of the grandee Šamaš-aḫa-iddina. The text records that Šamaš-aḫa-iddina's *šiluḫlu*s were brought to Aššur to be reviewed and divided between his three sons. It tallies the number of *šiluḫlu*s that were assigned to each son before summing up as follows: *napḫar* 999 *ṣābū šiluḫlū ša mārē Šamaš-aḫa-iddina ša qēpūtu ina libbi-āli ēšurūni* (altogether 999 *šiluḫlu*s of the sons of Šamaš-aḫa-iddina that the representatives reviewed in the inner city of Aššur).[580] When he died, Šamaš-aḫa-iddina by himself disposed of about a thousand other human beings. The text also records how many *šiluḫlu*s are absent, and whether their absence is because they have been assigned to someone else, they have died,[581] or are simply missing.

It was important to keep track of *šiluḫlu*s. Their death and flight is registered in numerous texts.[582] Indeed, *šiluḫlu*s are habitually counted and accounted for, and it is in this context that we have most of our evidence of them. The most comprehensive lists of *šiluḫlu*s have been recovered in Dūr-Katlimmu, which was the site of a well-regulated labor regime that included keeping rosters of workers and documenting the distribution of rations. A typical roster of *šiluḫlu*s records them by name, subdividing them into family units that are headed by

[580] VAT 15474: 28-30, copied as MARV 1.6 in Freydank 1976. On this text, see also Hirsch 1970, Freydank 1971, and Postgate 2014: 21: "This document may well have been drawn up in connection with the division of Šamaš-aḫa-iddina's estate, as the two opening sections of this text give the numbers of *šiluḫlu* inherited by the two presumably older brothers, Ištar-ereš (565) and Qibi-Aššur (249). It demonstrates clearly that the rights exercised by the father over about 1,000 dependents were transferred to the next generation of his family."
[581] It is not clear when the previous tally was conducted against which the number of dead *šiluḫlu*s is being compared, so that the numbers are sadly not useful for calculating mortality rates. Even so, the number of dead listed for the three groups of *šiluḫlu*s is 117/565, 21/249, and 26/173, or 21, 8, and 15% respectively.
[582] See for instance DeZ 2515: 47 (cited in Fincke 1994: 40, footnote 9), which refers to *ḫamšat šiḫlulū mētūtu ū ḫalqūtu* (five deceased or runaway *šiluḫlu*s). For another example, see VAT 18086: R6, copied as MARV 2.27 in Freydank 1982, which refers to 130 *šiluḫlū mētūtu* (130 deceased *šiluḫlu*s).

the male *paterfamilias* when there is one, or by the next ranking individual by seniority when no *paterfamilias* is available. Qualifying information is included for each *šiluḫlu*, classifying them according to relevant characteristics like sex, age, work status, and other individually variable criteria.[583] There is a particularly consistent and thorough system of classification according to age, with categories that trace the development of individuals through quite narrowly delimited developmental stages. As J.N. Postgate observes,

> *This elaborate classification of the workers by age derives from the dual exploitative and pastoral concerns of the administration: on one hand, it was interested in the details of the labour force to establish how many hands it could call on for specific duties, and, on the other hand, it needed to know how many mouths it had to feed, that is the nutritional requirements of the families listed, because the purpose of these lists was to establish the volume of grain required to keep them alive, and/or to supply the officials with the evidence they needed to account for the amounts they disbursed.*[584]

There are, for instance, categories that distinguish between breastfeeding infants (*mār irti/zīzi* – literally child of the breast)[585] and weaned young children (*pirsu*). The importance of this

[583] See Text 2 in Salah 2014: 71-75 for an example of such a roster.
[584] Postgate 2014: 20. See also page 21 for the observation that *šiluḫlu*s may sometimes have been obliged to serve in the army as light support troops: "Given that adult and at least some adolescent male *šiluḫlu* dependants are classified by their weapons – as archers or slingers – it seems likely that they would have been enrolled to fight on occasion, but our sources do not currently allow us to say if this would have come under the heading of *ilku* service."
[585] For the reading *zīzu* in the place of *irtu* in Middle Assyrian, see Llop 2010b: 129-30, which is also noted in Postgate 2014: 20.

distinction lies largely in the fact that the former do not receive rations, whereas the latter do. Because of the concentration of lists documenting a single population in a single place, the rosters from Dūr-Katlimmu allow us to trace the life courses of individuals over time. A certain Zabibâ, for example, features in a series of texts with her infant (*ša irti/zīzi*) Amtu, who progresses through the developmental categories into adolescence (*tārītu*).[586] As an adolescent, Amtu features without her mother in one ration list.[587] She is described as a *mulā'u* (an additional worker), which suggests that a work team was short of personnel and drafted her in for service. At this stage, Amtu is on her way to becoming a full-fledged member of the *šiluḫlu* workforce.

Like livestock, *šiluḫlu*s had to be fed. They are recorded receiving basic rations at many different sites. A text from Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta tabulating the collection of grain designates that a significant quantity is *ana kurummat šiluḫlī rēš-nēberāyē* (for the rations of the Rēš-Nēberaean *šiluḫlu*s).[588] On a smaller scale, a letter from a servant to his absent lady reports on affairs at her estate. As an afterthought – appended even after the date formula that normally would conclude the text – the servant notes that he has given provisions to the *šiluḫlu*s.[589] It is generally unclear how great a share of the diet of *šiluḫlu*s their rations were supposed to

[586] The pair features in texts 53: 35, 54: 38, 55: 34, 60: 47, 61: 34, 64: 26, 65: '3, and 70: 29 in Salah 2014, and Zabibâ features without her daughter in 59: 11.
[587] Text 67: 34 in Salah 2014: 275-276.
[588] VS 21, 23: R7, edited in Freydank 1994: 16-17.
[589] A. 2704: 25-26, edited in Brinkman and Donbaz 1985: 81. The letter states that 2 *sūtu* of provisions each *ana ṣābē šiluḫli attidin* (I have given to the *šiluḫlu*s)

represent. In Tell Sabi Abyad, the quantities of grain issued to *šiluḫlu*s only amounted to about half of their caloric needs.[590] The lack of variety in the rations issued to to *šiluḫlu*s (grain, grain, and more grain) also suggests that there must have been some way for them to acquire different foodstuffs with which to supplement their nutritional intake. This suggests that *šiluḫlu*s engaged in supplementary agriculture for their own ends, too, which was likely conducted on small subsistence plots that they would have been permitted to till for themselves.[591] The only situation in which overseers of *šiluḫlu*s[592] might have been expected to provide for all of the dietary needs of their wards is one in which they are made to work in places at excessive distance from their homes. In addition to receiving grain, *šiluḫlu*s are issued with clothes. Several texts from Dūr-Katlimmu record the distribution of *mašḫuru* garments to individual *šiluḫlu*s.[593] It is likely that these garments were in turn produced by still other *šiluḫlu*s.[594] The association of a particular type of garment with *šiluḫlu*s writ large indicates that they were all similarly dressed, and thus easily recognizable.[595] This was a highly regimented population.

[590] Wiggermann 2000: 180-181. Wiggermann concludes on page 187 that "these figures show unequivocally that a *šiluḫlu* could not survive on his rations alone, and that the additional sustenance fields… are a bare necessity."
[591] As per Wiggermann 181, building on the situation documented in Kār-tukultī-Ninurta and analyzed by Freydank 1980.
[592] Such a position is attested in two texts from Atmannu, which refer to a *ša muḫḫi šiluḫlī* (overseer of the *šiluḫlu*s). See texts 15 and 21 in Ismail and Postgate 2008: 166-167 and 172 respectively.
[593] See texts 10 and 24-26 in Salah 2014: 90-91 and 126-131.
[594] Text 47 in Salah 2014: 203-208, for instance, documents the distribution of wool to female weavers for the production of textiles, including the *mašḫuru* garment. Text B in Tsukimoto 1992: 26-28 also documents the disbursement of wool to female weavers for the production of textiles, among which is the *mašḫuru* garment.
[595] As noted by Postgate 2010: 33.

If life at the bottom of the social hierarchy seems grim, that's probably because in many ways it was. It's not all doom and gloom, however. The deeper insight afforded into the life courses of individual *šiluḫlu*s by the texts of Dūr-Katlimmu demonstrates that for some of them, life may have been solitary, poor, nasty, and brutish, but it was not so short. One female *šiluḫlu* named Bādūya lived to be at least 65 years old, and she is not the only one to reach such an advanced age.[596] The elderly were kept around after their productive capacity declined. One list features the following entry: *Mutakkiltu šēbat iškāra lā teppaš akala lā takkal* (Mutakkiltu is elderly. She does not perform a work assignment, she does not eat food).[597] There is an analogous entry in a separate list: *Mannu-šāninša šēbat iškāra lā teppaš kurummatta lā takkal* (Mannu-šāninša is elderly. She does not perform a work assignment, she does not consume a ration).[598] Although the notes about eating no food and receiving no rations sound ominous, these women were likely being supported by other *šiluḫlu*s rather than being left to starve. There are also elderly men who no longer do their work assignments, but their entries are not accompanied by observations about not eating or the withholding of rations.[599] For the

[596] As calculated by Salah 2014: 2, who offers commentary and further evidence of individuals who were likely in the 60-70 year age bracket.
[597] Text 3: 14-16 in Salah 2014: 76-77.
[598] Text 8: 14-16 in Salah 2014: 87.
[599] Text 18: 1 in Salah 2014: 104-111 has the entry *Salmānu-uṣur šēb iškāra lā eppaš* (Salmānu-uṣur, elderly; he does not perform a work assignment), while line 32 has the entry *Ištarēni šēb iškāra lā eppaš* (Ištarēni, elderly; he does not perform a work assignment). This same text also includes blind people, and a person described as *ḫabbudat* who does not work.

occasional *šiluḫlu*, it seems, it was possible to raise a family and live a long life while toiling for the landlord.

4.3.4 Adding to the Flock of Misérables

Labor shortages are a perennial problem in preindustrial societies.[600] For members of the Assyrian ruling class to increase their wealth, it was necessary to secure more workers. These workers could be deployed to bring more land under cultivation, which would increase the agricultural output at the landowner's disposal. From the perspective of government, more people had the further benefit of increasing the human pool from which it could extract labor services, including for military ends. Increasing the working population of the Assyrian realm was the key to increasing its wealth and expanding its armed forces. When they could do so, therefore, Assyrian armies often returned from campaigns with large numbers of captives from defeated lands.[601] This same dynamic is equally true of the polities with which Assyria came into contact: deportation was a common Near Eastern practice, of which the Assyrian kingdom could itself be the victim.[602]

[600] On this point, see Crone 2003: 31-34. Galil 2007: 347-349 observes precisely such a shortage in the context of the Neo-Assyrian period. For an analysis of demographic patterns that account for persistent labor shortages in Babylonia, see most recently the welcome study of Tenney 2017. This is a useful parallel for any consideration of the Middle Assyrian evidence, or indeed Mesopotamian evidence more broadly.
[601] See Harrak 1987: 269-273 for an overview of Middle Assyrian deportation.
[602] A.0.78.1 iii 21-29 in Grayson 1987: 235-236 acknowledges that soldiers from Katmuḫu carried off Assyrian subjects.

Evidence of deportees is plentiful in Middle Assyrian administrative texts. The disbursement of rations to deportees by the government features prominently. In one text concerning grain of the palace in the charge of the governor and mayor of Aššur, it is said that *ûm anniu ana kurummat ṣābē Kašši'ē ḫubtē ša māt Karduniaš ša šittā ḫarrānāte tadin* (this grain is allotted for the rations of the Kassite people, captives of the land of Karduniaš from two campaigns).[603] An analogous example describes a quantity of grain as *ša ekallim ša qāt Mušallim-Šamaš mār Mār-*[…] *bēl pāḫite ša Taidi ša ina abat šarre ana ṣābē našḫūte ša Naḫur tadnūni* ([grain] of the palace in the charge of Mušallim-Šamaš, son of Mār-[…], governor of Taidu, allotted to the deportees from the city of Naḫur by order of the king).[604] Still a third text documents the delivery of over five million(!) liters of grain[605] as rations for Kassites, who are almost certainly deportees. This letter also expresses interest in the condition of these deportees, stating that *annaka ana ṣābē Kašši'ē ša ina Kalḫi usbūni šulmu* (here, the Kassites resident in Kalḫu are well), and that *ekkulū lā bari'ū* (they are eating, not hungry).[606] Further,

[603] VAT 8926: 11-17, edited as text 57 in Postgate 1988: 146. See also VAT 17999: 44 in Freydank 1974a: 6, which records the delivery of grain *ana kurummat ṣābē Kašši'ē ḫubtē ša māt Karduniaš* (for the rations of the Kassite people, captives of the land of Karduniaš). The description is identical with that of VAT 8926.
[604] VAT 9016: 2-8, edited as text 29 in Postgate 1988: 57-58.
[605] The text is MARV 1.71, edited in Postgate 2014: 18. Line 11 records the number "1 *šūši* 6 ANŠE 3 BAN 7 SILA ŠE", or 66,375 *emāru* of grain. Powell 1987-1990: 502 offers the conversion "*imēru* ≈ 79-82 liters." Multiplying 66,375 by 80 yields a product of 5,310,000 liters. MARV 1.71: 18-19 states that 1 *qû* (.8 liters) of grain will be issued per person per day for a period of two months (cf. line 12, which has one month – but the sign 1 is preceded by *ša*, so that missing a wedge is not a major oversight on the part of the writer; I have not had the opportunity to collate the tablet). At that rate, the quantity of grain is enough to supply 1,383 people. Further, if one calculates that 1 liter of wheat = .8 kilos, and that .8 kilos of wheat = 2,720 calories, then 1 *qû* = 2,210 calories. Each person collecting their 1 *qû* daily ration of grain would thus be receiving just under the recommended daily intake of 2,500 calories for an adult male, and just over the recommended intake of 2,000 calories for an adult female.
[606] MARV 1.71: 8-9 and 20 respectively, edited in Postgate 2014: 18.

the writer records that the deportees have twice been issued meat, but that some of them are sick and that there is a lack of salt. It is not clear how typical this level of concern for the welfare of deportees is, or if it expresses anything more than an interest in ensuring that as many of them as possible reach their ultimate destinations in good condition. Either way, processing deportees in the thousands was a logistically complex and taxing enterprise that attests to the organizational capacity of the Middle Assyrian authorities.

And indeed, the number of deportees could be immense, as it was in the second half of the 13th century under Tukultī-Ninurta. This king's victory over Kassite Babylonia resulted in an influx of many thousands of Kassites into his realm.[607] Tukultī-Ninurta put a significant proportion of them to work in the construction of Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta, as he did with so many of his other subjects. There were at least 8,000 or so Kassite deportees working on the site,[608] where smaller groups are as usual recorded receiving their rations. There is, for instance, the telling disbursement of grain *ana kurummat* 80 *ṣābē kaššiʾē ša šipra ina ekalli ša Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta ēpušūni* (as rations for 80 Kassites who have labored on the palace of Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta).[609] How do you keep so many people who entertain plausible resentment against you compliant and under control? There is not much direct evidence, but there might be a clue in

[607] This is reflected in the textual record, too. See Galter 1988: 228.
[608] As per the estimate of Jakob 2003: 89-90. See also Freydank 1975: 60.
[609] VAT 18007: 91-92, edited as MARV 2.17 and cited in Jakob 2003: 45.

the existence of an official called the *ša ḫuṭāre* ("baton-man", or something like that).[610] The office is only known from a few texts, so it does not appear to have been especially common. Despite its rarity, 68 baton-men are attested receiving rations in Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta, at precisely the time when there were so many deportees (and others) working there.[611] It is a small speculative leap, but it is possible to imagine that the function of the baton-man was to carry a cudgel and keep the workers in check, as is depicted in the later reliefs of the Neo-Assyrian period.[612] This would explain why there are so many of them in Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta when so few are known from elsewhere. It is curious that among the few *ša ḫuṭāre*s whose names are recorded, one is called Kaššû.[613] The name translates as "Kassite", and thus indicates that the office was open to members of the groups that the *ša ḫuṭāre*s supervised. Pursuing this idea to its end, perhaps the analogy of the Kapo is appropriate.

The ultimate destination of most deportees was resettlement in the countryside, where they could contribute to expanding the Assyrian resource base. As tillers of the land without title to the land they tilled, resettled deportees appear to have joined the ranks of the *šiluḫlu*s.[614] Among the *šiluḫlu*s of Šamaš-aḫa-iddina, some are qualified as *Šelenāyū*

[610] See Jakob 2003: 223-224 for attestations of this official. Aynard and Durand 1980: 4 propose the translation *pâtre* (shepherd).
[611] MARV 2.17: 54 in Freydank 1982.
[612] This is also suggested by Jakob 2003: 224.
[613] See AO 19.227: 9 in Aynard and Durand 1980: 3.
[614] This is also the conclusion of Postgate 2014: 19: "The condition of deportee cannot have been a permanent status, and it seems likely that in most cases such people would have ended up as *šiluḫlu*."

(Šeleneans).[615] This implies that they differed from their fellow *šiluḫlu*s in terms of origins, which would likely be the result of having been brought to the land from other parts. In the western settlement of Ḫarbe, texts document the presence of Elamites, who are listed according to the same principles that govern the *šiluḫlu* rosters of Dūr-Katlimmu.[616] That war captives were being resettled in Ḫarbe is explicit in a list that assigns 23 individuals – 15 working women (*ša šipre*), 6 adolescents, 1 weaned child, and an infant – to different houses (only the infant gets to stay with its mother). The list concludes with the summary statement *napḫar* 23 *ṣābū šallūtu* (altogether 23 people, spoils of war), making clear that these people were taken in war.[617] The same phrasing is used in a longer list of people from a text in Aššur, which likewise concludes with the formula *napḫar* 47 *ṣābū šallūtu ša ina qāt Adad-mušabši imḫuru* (altogether 47 people, spoils of war, that he received from the charge of Adad-mušabši).[618] In this case the individuals are not named. They are, however, qualified, and they include 12 adult males, of whom 9 are blind.[619] This is an unnatural proportion of blind men, especially because none of the 15 adult females are blind, and neither are any of the non-adults of either sex. The probable explanation is that these men were blinded after they were captured in war, a practice attested

[615] VAT 15536: 13-15, edited in Freydank 1974b.
[616] For instance in texts 69 and 70 in Jakob 2009: 97-100, which lists individual Elamites by name in family groups headed by the *paterfamilias* and including other relevant classificatory information like sex and age.
[617] Text 64: 28 in Jakob 2009: 92-93.
[618] Text 70: 11-12 in Postgate 1988: 170-171.
[619] Text 70: 1-2 in Postgate 1988: 170-171.

in the Middle Assyrian period[620] and with many parallels in ancient Mesopotamia.[621] This interpretation is bolstered by the fact that the same text records a separate set of captives that consists entirely of 15 blind men from the land of Amurru, which are added to the original group.[622] When not employed directly on building projects for the king, most deportees joined the social hierarchy at the bottom, going where their new masters had most use of them.

4.4 The *Aššurāyū* in Categorical Context

4.4.1 The Categorical Landscape

We have had ample opportunity to observe that the Middle Assyrian world was teeming with social categories. There were the universal divisions of life stage and sex,[623] as well as divisions of social class, rank, and occupation. These categories served clear purposes in organizing the social space. Categories like landholder and *šiluḫlu* determine rights and responsibilities. The division of working people according to sex and life stage determines the rations they receive[624] and funnels them into different lines of work. Distinctions of rank determine access to social and economic capital, solidifying an upper stratum of extremely wealthy families who hoard access to high office in the service of the king. This complex of

[620] The 13th century Middle Assyrian king Shalmaneser claims to have blinded 14,400 captives in A.0.77.1: 74 (Grayson 1987: 184), and the 11th century Middle Assyrian king Aššur-bēl-kala claims to have blinded an unspecified number of captives in A.0.89.1: 10 (Grayson 1991: 88).
[621] Blind prisoners of war are especially well attested in Ur III texts, for which see Heimpel 2009.
[622] Text 70: 13-15 in Postgate 1988: 170-171.
[623] On the position of women in the Middle Assyrian world, see Saporetti 1979, Démare-Lafont 2011, and Stol 2016: Chapter 31.
[624] On differentiated rations according to sex and age, see Jakob 2003: 49.

categories performs its work, shunting people into predetermined paths and giving shape to a social world. We have also encountered in passing numerous categories that appear to describe what might conventionally be considered ethnic groups. There are Kassites and Subareans, Šeleneans and Rēš-Nēberaeans, and many others besides. One of these categories is precisely the one we are interested in: *Aššurāyū* – the Assyrians.

To get a sense of the Assyrian social category, it is important first to grapple with the broader group of categories to which it belongs. One of the most common of these categories, and one that is also prominent in the Old Assyrian evidence, is that of the Subareans. In the Old Assyrian texts, the Subareans feature as an extrinsic population that lives to the north and northwest of Aššur and speaks Hurrian. The linguistic and geographic distinctiveness of Subareans is equally apparent in the Middle Assyrian record. There are references to an area called *māt Šubarî rapašta* (the extensive land of the Subareans),[625] indicating the association of Subareans with a particular geographical space. Equally, there are references to Subarean interpreters,[626] indicating their association with a particular language. We encounter large numbers of Subareans at work in Kār-tukultī-Ninurta,[627] and a *dunnu* of Subareans near Tell Sabi Abyad.[628] Subareans were not an entirely undifferentiated group of people. There are texts

[625] A.0.78.23: 37 in Grayson 1987: 272.
[626] See Jakob 2003: 541-542 on attestations of the *targumannu* (interpreter), including a *rab targumannē* (chief of the interpreters) for Subarean.
[627] See Freydank 1980.
[628] See T 93-7: 5-15 in Wiggerman 2000: 209: *ṣāḫitū šamaššammūšunu liḫluṣū šumma šamaššammu ina dunnīkunu lâššu ana dunni ša šubrê alkā šamaššamma ana ṣāḫitē dinā liḫluṣū* (The oil-pressers must press their sesame. If

that subdivide them on geographical grounds, like a short note from Tell Sabi Abyad that refers to a *ṭuppu ša unûte ša šubrê Šadikanni'ē* (tablet of the tools of the Šadikkanean Subareans).[629] On an individual level, there is no suggestion that Subareans are subject to special treatment of any kind because of their being Subarean. Although Subarean names in Middle Assyrian texts are primarily attested among the lowest socioeconomic strata, there are some minor officials with such names.[630] At its most explicit, there are individuals like Šubri'u, whose name means "Subarean" and who serves as a perfectly ordinary witness in a legal transaction in Shibanibe.[631] Being Subarean was no guarantee of servile status, and, to the best of our knowledge, no barrier to full participation in Assyrian society (within other categorical limits, of course).[632] It is, in fact, not always clear where the Subarean social category begins and where it ends. In Dūr-Katlimmu, there is a tendency among those with Subarean names to give their children names that include the divine element Aššur.[633] Without knowledge of their parents' names, there is

there is no sesame in your *dunnu,* go to the *dunnu* of the Subaraeans, and distribute sesame to the oil-pressers there; let them press it).

[629] T 96-23 in Wiggerman 2000: 207.

[630] See Jakob 2005: 182-183.

[631] Text 11: 20 in Finkelstein 1953: 126. Šubri'u's role as witness and his patronymic indicate that he is not of servile status. For another individual with this name, see YBC 12863: 2-3, edited as text 4 in Machinist 1982: 74; see also Machinist's note on line 3. See Saporetti 1970a: 466 for an older (and thus incomplete) list of attestations of individuals named Šubri'u or its feminine equivalent Šubrittu.

[632] See Owen 1995: 575-576 for a text from Emar or its vicinity that involves a merchant bearing the Hurrian name Ari-Teššub who is identified as a man of the land of Aššur (LU KUR Aššur).

[633] As noted by Salah 2014: 1: "Es ist zu unterstreichen, dass in den *šiluḫlu*-Familien, in denen der Vater bzw. die Mutter oder auch die beiden Elternteile mit sutäischen oder hurritischen bzw. nicht-semitischen Namenformen bekannt sind, die Kinder häufig assyrische bzw. akkadische Namen tragen." (It should be emphasized that in the *šiluḫlu*-families where the father, the mother, or both parents have Sutean or Subarean names, or more precisely non-Semitic names, the children have primarily Assyrian, or more precisely Akkadian, names.)

nothing at all that would indicate that these children had any association with Subareans. Being Subarean was a contingent business. Subareanness was only relevant in certain contexts, as an easy way of differentiating between people based on language, provenance, or ancestry. There will have been a spectrum of Subareanness, manifest in many distinct configurations. Not all Subareans are found in the land of Subartu, and not all Subareans will have spoken Subarean. The important thing was to retain some association with the category that enabled occasional differentiation. And not everyone appears to have done even that. As the children of Dūr-Katlimmu demonstrate, some potential Subareans appear to have stopped being Subarean altogether.

Another seemingly ethnic social category is that of the Kassites, the people of southern Mesopotamia. The very name of the category is odd, because it derives from the provenance of the contemporary Babylonian ruling class rather than from any indigenous classification of origins. Kassites were said to have come from the Zagros mountains as conquerors of Babylonia, where they established a ruling dynasty. Strictly speaking, most deportees from southern Mesopotamia would therefore not have been Kassite at all, but local people without any immediate ties to the former Kassite homeland.[634] Although it is certainly possible that

[634] The onomastic evidence of Kassites in Assyria points in this direction too: when their names are recorded, most have good Babylonian names, and only a few have Kassite names. In the personnel lists from Dūr-Katlimmu, for instance, there are numerous names that include the element of the Babylonian god Marduk, but no obviously Kassite ones. As with all onomastic evidence, it's not clear to what extent the names should be understood as significative of belonging to a particular group. For an older (and thus incomplete) list of attestations of individuals named Kašši'u in the Middle Assyrian evidence, see Saporetti 1970a: 276. It is especially notable that when the

southern Mesopotamians adopted the term to describe themselves and without any sense of connection to a geographically Kassite origin,[635] it is striking that the term falls into desuetude in Babylonia and elsewhere after the fall of the Kassite dynasty. What then does the term Kassite really mean when we see it applied to deportees, or to others in Assyria?[636] The Tukultī-Ninurta Epic might help provide an answer. In that text, the Kassite king of Babylonia is described as *šar Kaššî* (king of the Kassites).[637] This can be contrasted with references to the Assyrian king as *aššurî* (the Assyrian), or to the *šarrūt Aššurî* (kingship of the Assyrian).[638] The text appears to be associating kingship with particular groups: there is a Kassite king, who is sovereign over Kassites, and an Assyrian king, who is likewise sovereign over Assyrians. Since many of the Kassite deportees in Middle Assyrian administrative texts are not Kassite in the same way that the ruling dynasty is, the use of the term in the Tukultī-Ninurta Epic suggests that its primary association might be with subjection to the Kassite king. To the extent that subjection to the Kassite king corresponds to the geographical boundaries of southern Mesopotamia, the term can be construed as denoting the provenance of those it describes. But

names of the relatives of these individuals are known, they conform entirely to the conventions of Babylonian onomastics.

[635] See Shelley 2017 for a review of evidence of the usage of the term *Kaššû* in its various forms. His results regarding its adoption by southern Mesopotamians are inconclusive.

[636] For example, MARV 10.76: 3-8, edited as text 76 in Prechel and Freydank 2014: 966, refers to six *nappāḫū Kaššiʾū* (Kassite smiths); text 12: 35 in Jakob 2009: 52 refers to a brewer who is a *Kaššiʾu* (Kassite).

[637] For instance C iii 5 and A v 21 in Machinist 1978: 98 and 116 respectively. See page 55 for a list of further uses of this epithet in the Epic. The same descriptions is attested in the royal inscriptions of Tukultī-Ninurta, for instance in A.0.78.5: 60 in Grayson 1987: 245, which refers to *Kaštilašu šar Kaššî* (Kashtiliash, king of the Kassites).

[638] A iii 25 and A v 26 in Machinist 1978: 92 and 116 respectively. See page 55 for a list of further uses of this epithet in the Epic.

it might be more accurate to view the Kassite category as a reference to a onetime status of subjection: Kassites are those who are or were subjects of the Kassite king. This reading is reinforced by the language of royal inscriptions, in which individual kings have their own *nišū* (people). It is similarly reinforced by the later Synchronistic History, a chronicle that records the historical interaction between the kings of Assyria and those of Babylonia (called Karduniaš). In moments of political unity between the two kingdoms, the chronicle states that *nišū māt Aššur māt Karduniaš itti aḫāmeš ibballū* (the peoples of Assyria and Karduniaš were mixed together).[639] The implication is that each king has his own body of subjects, and that these can be brought together to form a single body politic. Had any such political union lasted, perhaps a single category would have described the Kassites and Assyrians as subjects of a single king. This reading makes sense of a phrase that surfaces in later Middle Assyrian royal inscription: 6,000 *sītet ummānātēšunu ša ina pān kakkēya ipparšidū šēpēya iṣbatū alqâššunūtīma ana nišē mātīya amnūšunūti* (the remaining 6,000 of their soldiers who had fled before my weapons seized my feet. I took them and counted them as people of my land).[640] Taking people from a foreign land and bringing them into your realm is enough to make them people of your land – functional Assyrians, since they are subject to the Assyrian king.

[639] See Chronicle 21: ii 36-37 and *passim* in Grayson 2000: 165.
[640] A.0.87.1: i 84-88 in Grayson 1991: 14. The same formula is also used in the context of Subareans in A.0.87.1: iii 5-6 in Grayson 1991: 17.

While this dynamic works in some contexts, it is not the end of the story. On the contrary, people in Assyria are still described as Kassites long after they have become subjects of the Assyrian king. There is a Middle Assyrian *līmu* official named Kaššû (Kassite), and another one named Kaštiliašu (an unambiguously Kassite name).[641] Accordingly, not only could a person maintain explicit ties with Kassiteness while being subject to the Assyrian king, but it was also possible to do so while functioning at the highest levels of the Assyrian hierarchy. A much starker and more problematic example is that of Meli-Saḫ. The Urad-Šerū'a archive from Aššur preserves documents from a series of *patresfamilias* in a family of grandees based in the city. This Aššur-based family was already active in the 14th century, and served the kings of Assyria at least into the 12th century. One would be hard-pressed to think of a more "Assyrian" family than this. And then, amid the unremarkable Assyrian names of the *patresfamilias*, there appears Meli-Saḫ.[642] This is an unambiguously Kassite name,[643] yet it is borne by a grandee of impeccable Assyrian pedigree whose own descendants have names that comply with standard Assyrian onomastic practice. Does Meli-Saḫ's name suggest that he is somehow Kassite? Perhaps Meli-Saḫ's mother was a Kassite,[644] or some other personal reason motivated the choice of name. Either way, there are no noticeable consequences that result from Meli-Saḫ's

[641] For an attestation of the *līmu* Kaššû, see text 82: 23 in Donbaz 2016. For an attestation of the *līmu* Kaštiliašu, see MARV IV: 148: r'5 in Freydank 2001. For a list of Middle Assyrian *līmu*s, see Bloch 2012: Appendix 1.
[642] See Postgate 1988: viii for a table illustrating the genealogy of this family, and pages xi-xiii for an overview of the family's activities and occupation of government offices.
[643] On the Kassite character of the divine element Saḫ and its use in names, see Krebernik 2006-2008.
[644] This is suggested by Freydank 2005: 62.

name.[645] He serves as governor and transmits his exalted social position to his son and heir. The implications of the Meli-Saḫ case are significant. First, onomastic evidence without adequate context can lead to misguided conclusions. Second, the boundaries between many of the categories we are examining are permeable. And third, the reasons for deploying a category are variable. In this way, the Kassite category can denote political subjection, but doesn't have to. Political subjection is just one element to be added to a composite Assyrian picture of Kassiteness that can include other modes of association, be they ancestral, cultural, linguistic or something else entirely.

There is further scope for complication. As a category, Suteans are prominent in sources from the Assyrian West, where they operate like members of the ethnic-esque categories treated above. A remarkable text from Tell Sabi Abyad preserves an agreement between the grand vizier Ilī-padâ and twelve Sutean notables.[646] The Sutean notables pledge to refrain from providing shelter or material aid to any Kassites, Suheans, Subareans, or other Suteans who are hostile to Ilī-padâ. The text also commits the Sutean notables to putting to death or extraditing any Assyrians who come to them as enemies of Ilī-padâ. In return, Ilī-padâ pledges that Sutean property seized by Assyrians will be restored to its erstwhile Sutean owners. This is not a simple

[645] As per the conclusion of Freydank 2005: 62: "Jedenfalls findet sich kein Argument dafür, dass der Name und eine etwaige Abstammung in der mütterlichen Linie Meli-Saḫ im assyrischen Milieu in irgendeiner Weise herausgehoben oder herabgesetzt haben." (In any case, there is no argument to be made that the name or possible [Kassite] maternal descent of Meli-Saḫ elevated or marginalized him in any way in the Assyrian milieu.)
[646] The text is T 04-13, and has so far been made public only in Dutch translation, for which see Wiggermann 2010: 55-56.

categorical landscape.[647] There are numerous groups interacting all at once: Ilī-padâ is nominally in control of the area around Tell Sabi Abyad and, if the existence of the nearby *dunnu* of the Subareans is any indication, in control of the local Subareans and Kassites too.[648] Away from the arable lands along the Balikh River, however, it seems that Sutean groups enjoy significant freedom from control. This attracts fugitives and opponents of Ilī-padâ from various backgrounds, including some Assyrians. Aside from the complexity of the social interactions documented in the agreement, it communicates clearly that differences are perceived between various groups. These categories are carrying out further organizational work.

It is not just that there are many social groups in a common sphere of interaction, or that different Sutean groups do different things, or that individual Assyrians can go rogue and oppose the Assyrian authorities. Upon closer inspection, many of these groups don't seem to be clearly differentiated at all. Take the Suteans and the Subareans, for instance. They appear to be two distinct groups, but among the lists of workers in Dūr-Katlimmu is an entry that reads *Šubrītu Sutītu ša šipri* (Šubrītu, Sutean, worker).[649] This individual's name means "Subarean", and yet she is classified as Sutean. What are we to make of the relationship between her name

[647] A comparably complex situation can be discerned in a letter from Ḫarbe, which likewise relates convoluted interactions between Subareans, Kassites, Suteans, and Assyrians. See Text 15 in Jakob 2009: 54-55.
[648] The idea that Kassites and Subareans in the Assyrian West are subjects of the Assyrian state, and in the case of the Kassites also deportees, is reflected in a letter from Dūr-Katlimmu. The letter reports that a swarm of locusts has driven out the population of Waššukanni, leaving only 50 Kassite hostages and captives (*lū līṭū lū ṣabtūtu*) and 50 Subarean captives in the city (see text 2: 15-21 in Cancik-Kirschbaum 1996: 94-106). There were, accordingly, Kassite and Subarean captives in the Assyrian West.
[649] She appears in text 58: 40 in Salah 2014: 242.

and her classification? Perhaps Sutean simply does not designate a group on the basis of geography, language, or subjection to a royal lord.[650] There is, after all, no Sutean polity analogous to Assyria or Babylonia, and no attested land or language of Sutu. Instead, Suteans are associated with a mobile lifestyle beyond the reach of everyday Assyrian control.[651] The category designates a group based on its form of socioeconomic organization, indicating a pastoral existence outside of the framework of intensive agriculture that characterizes the economies of the large kingdoms.[652] In this light, it should be possible to be both Subarean *and* Sutean. Šubrītu was conceivably snatched from a Sutean community beyond the reach of Assyrian rule in the course of a raid. While Šubrītu might normally qualify as a Subarean based on her language or some other characteristic, her origin in a Sutean community is of greater relevance from the point of view of administrators in the Assyrian system. Maybe this is because most *šiluḫlu*s in the area were Subarean, and thus the designation had no added value; a Sutean background, by contrast, would have been novel and deemed noteworthy.[653] The result is that the Subarean Šubrītu is classified as a Sutean, even as she finds herself living the antithesis of the Sutean life, toiling alongside the servile workers of the Assyrian state economy.

[650] See, for instance, the overview and conclusions of Jakob 2005: 184 and Cancik-Kirschbaum 1996: 40. For an overview of evidence of Suteans in the texts from Mari from the first quarter of the second millennium, see Ziegler and Reculeau 2014.

[651] But they also feature as ordinary Assyrian subjects, for instance in the *šiluḫlu* rosters of Dūr-Katlimmu. These rosters include numerous people who are identified as Suteans, like Šubrītu, and, for example, *Zabibâ Sutītu* (Zabibâ the Sutean) in text 53: 35 in Salah 2014: 225-227 and *passim*.

[652] This would be comparable to the designation "Hanean" (*ḫana*) in the Old Babylonian evidence from Mari, for which see Fleming 2004: 85-92.

[653] Though not always: assuming we are dealing with the same Zabibâ, her Suteanness remains unmarked in text 59: 11 in Salah 2014: 250.

Whatever the case may be, we have an additional layer of complexity. Sutean and Subarean function as designations for different groups in the treaty from Tell Sabi Abyad, but they are not mutually exclusive groups. It is only in the narrow and highly particular context of the treaty itself that such distinctions make sense. These are flexible categories with parameters and boundaries that shift depending on their context. Ilī-padâ and his Sutean interlocutors know who they mean when they use these categories, and that's what matters. A Subarean in an agricultural settlement that is part of the Assyrian system is a Subarean; a Subarean of standing among a group of Suteans is a Sutean. Ilī-padâ and the Suteans know who is who, and they don't have a doubt: but we don't, and we'll never find out.

And we have only begun to scratch the surface. The texts of Dūr-Katlimmu catalogue all sorts of people: Subareans and Suteans, Assyrians and Kassites, and others besides.[654] In one text, all these differences are subsumed in a single category by the act of designating this sea of human diversity collectively as *Dūr-Katlimmayê* (Dūr-Katlimmeans).[655] For some purposes, it is relevant to differentiate between Subareans and Assyrians, while for others it appears to make more sense to differentiate Dūr-Katlimmeans from non-Dūr-Katlimmeans. If it is possible to collapse categorical difference into a single superordinate category in this way, then how are we to know the diversity that labels like Kassite and Sutean conceal whenever they rear their

[654] See, for instance, the various gentilics attested in the personnel rosters of Dūr-Katlimmu in Salah 2014: 343-344.
[655] See text 76: 95 in Salah 2014: 318. The text is a ration list including 86 individual entries with names attesting to different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. This includes names that incorporate Marduk as the divine element, as well as Aššur, Amurru, and other deities.

heads? Similar problems are manifest when we deal with individuals. What do we do with Suti'u (Sutean), who appears to be the ranking official in Ḫarbe?[656] Here is an individual in a senior position in the local hierarchy, functioning to all intents and purposes as a good cog in the Assyrian wheel, and yet his name marks him as Sutean. But aren't Suteans supposed to be characterized by their pastoral lifestyle, by their existence beyond the reach of everyday Assyrian power? We are again confronted with the reality that these categories designate different things in different contexts. And what of a name like Ninu'āyu (Ninevite)? There are multiple attestations of people bearing this name,[657] which relates the individuals to the city of Nineveh. But what is the relationship it describes, and how does this impinge on membership in other categories? One of the brothers of the grand vizier Ilī-padâ was named Ninu'āyu, and he was an individual descended from the Assyrian royal family who participated in the project of Assyrian government.[658] Is his name simply an indication that perhaps he was born in Nineveh? That his parents were fond of the city? Does it have something to do with the goddess Ištar of Nineveh? We simply don't know what such a name is supposed to convey – and there might not be any one intended meaning. Individuals like Suti'u and Ninu'āyu, or the previously mentioned Šubrītu, Kaššû, and Meli-Saḫ, are drops in the bucket of categorical confusion. They help to disabuse us of any notion we might have of how ethnic-esque categories ought to

[656] Suti'u is the subordinate of the absent Sîn-mudammeq, from whom he receives instructions by letter. For Suti'u's correspondence, see texts 1-16 in Jakob 2009: 41-55.
[657] For instance in the place name *Dunnu ša Ninu'āye* (*dunnu* of the Ninevite), for which see Nashef 1982: 86, citing KAJ 101,10. The name Ninu'āyu is also attested in texts 37: 3, 49: 28, and 79: 7 in Donbaz 2016.
[658] See Fales 2014: 227 for a table documenting the family tree.

function. We do not find ourselves in a landscape where we can easily characterize people as belonging to any of the many attested groups, at least not beyond the immediate contexts in which they appear. Onomastic evidence can serve as a signpost, but it rarely allows us to make definitive statements about individuals. A Kassite name does not a Kassite make, and Subarean parents need not give birth to Subarean children. We are in the land of confusion.

Our confusion reflects a fundamental truth about the use of seemingly ethnic categories in the Middle Assyrian social world. That is that they were profoundly porous. People can be categorized differently in different contexts and seem able to move between categories without confronting significant obstacles. More than that, within the Assyrian system there appear to be no consequences to belonging to any one ethnic-esque category rather than another. Indeed, individuals exhibit indications of belonging to multiple categories at once. The permeability of this whole suite of seemingly ethnic categories leads inexorably to a single conclusion: they don't much matter. Outside of circumscribed interactions, they are not foundational to the organization of the social world. They don't demarcate significant differences in access to the various kinds of capital, they don't preordain rank or profession, and they don't determine who you can interact with, and on what terms. There is, accordingly, no apparent relationship between these categories and the distribution of power. They are not socially determinant. Although ethnic-esque categories are not central to the organization of the Middle Assyrian social world, they do serve to differentiate between people on various

grounds. These categories can designate a cocktail of elements ranging from geography and language to political allegiance and way of life. Where do the Assyrians fit in this bewildering cocktail?

4.4.2 The Aššurāyū

In the Middle Assyrian period, membership in the Assyrian social category is designated by the term *Aššurāyū* (Assyrians). Although the term is attested in different contexts, it is not found in all of the places where it might be expected. One body of texts from which the term is notably absent is that of royal inscriptions and literature more broadly. In royal inscriptions, Middle Assyrian kings never associate themselves with a particular category of people. They are the chosen agents of the god Aššur, and to the extent that they have a relationship with other humans it is as their shepherd. Such language pervades much of the inscriptional record, as in the following illustrative examples of royal epithets:

rē'û puḫur dadmē

shepherd of all the settlements[659]

šar kiššat nišē utul abrāti

king of all people, chief herdsman of humanity[660]

rē'û nādu

[659] A.0.77.1: 7-8 in Grayson 1987: 182.
[660] A.0.77.4: 2-3 and A.0.77.18: 3 in Grayson 1987: 192 and 207 respectively.

attentive shepherd[661]

ša kibrāt erbetti arki Šamaš irte'u

the one who shepherds the four quarters at the heels of Šamaš[662]

rē'û pāqissunu u utullu multēširšunu anāku

I, the shepherd who has charge over them and the chief herdsman who rightly guides them[663]

ša ina šulum šiberšu irte'u aburriš māssu

the one who shepherds his land in green pastures with his beneficent staff[664]

These titles all portray the king's role as pastoral: he has a flock, and he's in charge of it. This implies both that the king is responsible for the safety and wellbeing of his people, and that he exploits them and (literally) fleeces them. But nowhere is this people specified or named beyond the vaguest of generalities. Tiglath-Pileser comes closest to specifying the people for whom the king is responsible. One of his inscriptions describes his grandfather Mutakkil-Nusku as the one whom Aššur appoints *ana rē'ût māt Aššur* (to the shepherdship of the land of Aššur),[665] and his more distant predecessor Ninurta-apil-Ekur as the one who *ummanāt māt*

[661] A.0.78.1: i 3 in Grayson 1987: 233 and *passim*.
[662] A.0.78.1: i 17-18 in Grayson 1987: 233 and *passim*.
[663] A.0.78.1: iv 38-39 in Grayson 1987: 237 and *passim*.
[664] A.0.78.23: 6-7 in Grayson 1987: 271.
[665] A.0.87.1: vii 47-48 in Grayson 1991: 27.

Aššur kīniš irte''û (faithfully shepherded the army of the land of Aššur).[666] The Assyrian king is responsible for shepherdship in the land of Aššur, as well as for shepherding the army of the land of Aššur. This allows us to imagine that the people the king is shepherding are the Assyrians. In the absence of any affirmative statement to that effect, however, this conclusion remains nothing more than a tantalizing inference.

The same lack of clarity applies to literature. A Middle Assyrian psalm to the goddess Ištar refers to *nišū māt Aššur* (the people of the land of Aššur),[667] but says nothing about whether these people are Assyrians. In the Tukultī-Ninurta Epic, the Assyrian king is described as *aššurî* (the Assyrian),[668] but the label is not extended to his people. When the participation of human protagonists other than Tukultī-Ninurta is acknowledged in the Epic, they are referred to as *ummanāt* ^{d}*Aššur* (the troops of the god Aššur) and as *qurād* ^{d}*Aššur* (warriors of the god Aššur).[669] In both cases, the use of the divine determinative to mark the noun Aššur indicates that it refers to the god rather than to the land or the city. Tukultī-Ninurta's soldiers are the army of the god Aššur, but this says nothing about whether they are Assyrian.[670] A fragmentary text from Aššur, interpreted by its editor as a love lyric, appears to involve the Assyrian king and

[666] A.0.87.1: vii 59 in Grayson 1991: 28.
[667] Line 34 in the edition of von Soden 1974-77: 39.
[668] A description that also applies in a reference to *šarrūt Aššurî* (kingship of the Assyrian). See A iii 25 and A v 26 in Machinist 1978: 92 and 116 respectively.
[669] A iii 6 and A v 43 in Machinist 1978: 88 and 120 respectively.
[670] Indeed, the cultivation of a collective identity is notably absent from Middle Assyrian court literature. Cf. Assmann 2011: 123: "these texts – tribal myths, epic songs, genealogies, and so forth – answer the question, 'Who are we?' They define and reinforce the group identity and motivate communal action by narrating a shared history. These foundational, motivational tales are what we subsumed under the term 'mythomotor.'"

a *mārat Aššur* (daughter of Aššur).[671] Although not enough of the text survives for a secure interpretation, there is no suggestion here that the phrase *mārat Aššur* designates anything beyond the fact that the maiden is from the city, which is, after all, the place where the king lives. The absence of Assyrians as a category is not limited to royal inscriptions and literature. Practical texts dealing with the royal court likewise stop short of referring to Assyrians. A letter from Dūr-Katlimmu concerns an impending royal visit involving both the Assyrian and the Babylonian kings. Instructions are issued regarding the necessary preparations, and it is stated explicitly on two occasions that the preparations concern both royal entourages: *lū mārāt damqe niātu lū kaššiātu* (whether for our noblewomen or the Kassite ones), and *rabûtu gabbu lū niātu lū kašši'ū gabbu* (all of the grandees, whether ours or the Kassite ones, all of them).[672] Members of the Babylonian court are Kassites, and yet members of the Assyrian court are given no equivalent designation. They are simply "ours". Although the contrast between Kassites and "our" people can be read as indicative of an opposition between Kassites and presumed Assyrians,[673] there is no sustained interest in the Assyrian court in its own "Assyrian" character, or in Assyrianness more generally. The reference to Kassites is intended only to differentiate them as members of a separate royal court. The opposition between Kassites and "our" people contrasts belonging to different networks of patronage and power, not belonging to different

[671] VAT 10404: 7', edited in Frahm 2009: 143-145. See also Frahm's comment on line 7' on page 145.
[672] Text 10: 10-11 and 30-31 in Cancik-Kirschbaum 1996: 147-149.
[673] As per the comment on line 10 in Cancik-Kirschbaum 1996: 151: "Das gegensatzpaar *niātu/kaššiātu* ist hinsichtlich eines altorientalischen Nationalbewußtseins interessant." (The contrastive pairing *niātu/kaššiātu* is interesting from the point of view of an ancient Near Eastern national consciousness.)

ethnic-esque groups. To the extent that we read "Assyrian" in place of "ours", we should note that it carries no content beyond belonging to the retinue of a particular court.

If Assyrians are absent from the literary output of the royal court, this is not true of the Middle Assyrian Laws. Several paragraphs concern people identified explicitly as Assyrian. Here too, however, all is not as it seems. An important characteristic of the Laws is their local character. They are from Aššur and are unlikely to have been intended to apply far beyond its immediate environs. This is apparent in stipulations like the one governing the sale of land and houses. According to this stipulation, any transfer of immovable property is validated in the city of Aššur itself. There, a herald must first proclaim the buyer's intention to purchase the property three times within a single month, so that any other claimants have time to make their case. Not only that, but a variety of royal representatives, the herald, and the city scribe are joined by the mayor and three prominent men from the area where the transaction is to transpire.[674] An ordinance of this kind can hardly be expected to have governed transactions in places like Dūr-Katlimmu or Ḫarbe, where distance from Aššur would have rendered it costly and inconvenient to register every transfer of property in this way. The sense that the Middle Assyrian Laws are not designed to govern affairs beyond the Assyrian heartland is further

[674] B ¶ 6 in Roth 1997: 177-178. The same paragraph also stipulates that the intention to purchase must be proclaimed three times in the *ālu* where the transfer is to take place, but given the semantic range of the term *ālu* this can simply mean the towns and villages that constitute Aššur's hinterland and need not convey any sense of territorial universality. For evidence of the implementation of this law in Aššur, see VAT 8919: 19-20, edited as text 50 in Postgate 1988: 106-110. The text refers to a container of tablets recording the proclamations of the herald concerning houses in the inner city of Aššur.

apparent in a statute governing what happens when there is a sighting of witchcraft. Whoever hears somebody say that they witnessed such an act is to report directly to the king, who will personally supervise the proceedings to the point of conducting any required interrogation himself.[675] Again, it seems unlikely that this law is intended to be applied in the distant reaches of the kingdom, or that the king had the time and inclination to oversee every such case personally.[676]

The local character of the Middle Assyrian Laws informs their occasional references to Assyrians. One law that refers to Assyrians concerns a woman who leaves her husband: *šumma aššat a'īle ina pāni mutīša ramānša taltadad lū ina libbi āle ammiemma lū ina ālāni qurbūte ašar bēta uddûšenni ana bēt aššurāye tētarab* (if the wife of a man separates herself from her husband and enters the house of an Assyrian, whether in that city or in the nearby towns where he assigns a house to her).[677] What does it matter if she enters the house of an "Assyrian" or not? The law does not legislate for a situation in which the woman enters the house of a non-Assyrian. This silence is telling. It is not that entering the house of a non-Assyrian is less problematic, but rather that there is no effective jurisdiction in such cases. Essentially, Assyrians are those to whom the law applies, and the category should thus be understood as all those

[675] A ¶ 47 in Roth 1997: 172-173.
[676] It is possible that there were very few such cases, but the law is not set up in any way to discourage reporting. Instead, it states explicitly that those who come forward with a report need only declare the truth of their statement before the gods. No penalties or tests are imposed for false reporting beyond the act of swearing. Royal involvement is not presented as a deterrent, either, so that there is broad scope for abuse.
[677] A ¶ 24 in Roth 1997: 161-162. The reference to nearby towns and villages yet again points to the local character of the Middle Assyrian Laws.

under the authority of the Assyrian king. If a woman flees beyond that territory, there is no need for legislation as she is beyond the reach of Assyrian law.[678] Assyrians here are distinguished only by their subjection to Assyrian authority. An analogous use of the term "Assyrian" is attested in a law regulating the selling of a man or woman held as pledge to a *māte šanīte* (another land). This is prohibited, yet the law proceeds to declare that it is permitted to sell an *Aššurāyu* or *Aššurāyītu* (male or female Assyrian) held as pledge to a foreign land if their value is less than that of the debt.[679] The law concerns the selling of people held as pledge to another land, and has different rules depending on whether the value of the pledge exceeds or is less than the value of the debt. In one case it speaks of man and woman, and in the other of an Assyrian man and woman, but there is no reason to suspect a meaningful categorical distinction. The two usages are synonymous, so that "Assyrian" again functions merely to designate all those to whom the law applies. Indeed, the only law that refers exclusively to Assyrians stipulates that it is permissible to beat and mutilate those that are held as pledge if their value is less than that of the debt.[680] It would be odd if the term "Assyrian" here functioned as anything other than a synonym for person, as there is no reason to suspect that pledges should be treated differently depending on whether they are or are not Assyrian – and there is certainly no hint of favored treatment in this stipulation. References to Assyrians in

[678] It is worth noting that even when the Assyrian kingdom was at its most extensive, the distance from Aššur to territories controlled by the kingdom of Babylon was not more than a few days' journey.
[679] C ¶ 3 in Roth 1997: 182-183.
[680] A ¶ 44 in Roth 1997: 170.

the Middle Assyrian Laws indicate that the category had no real semantic value beyond designating those people under the king's jurisdiction, the people to whom the laws applied.[681] These are local laws for local people, and in this local, Assyrian context, the local people are Assyrians by default.

Everyday texts likewise recommend semantically limited interpretations of the Assyrian category. The Urad-Šerū'a archive includes an inventory tablet that catalogues the contents of a storeroom. Among other things, the inventory lists several *quppu*s (containers) of tablets that preserve a documentary record of outstanding debts and other relevant legal relationships. These tablets were organized in different groups and stored together in containers. In this way, for instance, there are *iltēn quppu tazkīte ša ṣābē u eqlēte ša āl Šarika iltēn quppu ša muḫḫi Aššur-lā-taḫaṭṭi* (one container of clearance(s) of people and fields of the city Šarika; one container of debt (tablets) owed by *Aššur-lā-taḫaṭṭi*).[682] The descriptions of five *quppu*s refer to Assyrians. There is a *quppu ša ṭuppāte pa''ugāte ša muḫḫi aššurāyē* (container of the expropriated tablets owed by Assyrians), as well as separate *quppu*s concerning cattle and donkeys, sheep, grain, and mixed silver *ša muḫḫi aššurāyē* (owed by Assyrians).[683] Aside from

[681] The only possible exception is the alleged reference to an Assyrian woman in A ¶ 40: v 43 in Roth 1997: 167-168, which would differentiate between women in general and Assyrian women. The term *aššurāyātu* (Assyrian women) does not, however, survive in any manuscript. It is at best a tentative reading, and one that is highly doubtful given the broader usage of the Assyrian category in the Middle Assyrian Laws. Lafont 2003: 530-531 reaches more or less the same conclusion about the meaning of the term *aššurāyū* in the Middle Assyrian Laws, arguing that it does not designate a separate class of people.
[682] VAT 8919: 11-13, edited as text 50 in Postgate 1988: 106-110.
[683] VAT 8919: 14, 17-18, and 21-23, edited as text 50 in Postgate 1988: 106-110

the *quppu*s of Assyrians, all the others are organized in relation to place, person, or, in one case, to shepherds as a category. The *quppu*s either bring together tablets relating to individuals with whom there are particularly numerous contractual relationships or tablets relating to specific places. The shepherds depart from this norm, probably because they operated outside of Aššur and did not have a common geographical base. They nevertheless form a coherent organizational group for purposes of recordkeeping. Given that the inventory tablet is itself from Aššur, as is the family whose property it catalogues, the *quppu*s of Assyrians should be approached as collections of tablets documenting specific kinds of contractual relationships with residents of Aššur. In other words, if there were two dozen debt tablets concerning grain owed by separate individuals in Aššur, they would be deposited together in the *quppu* of grain owed by Assyrians. In this light, "Assyrians" is simply shorthand for residents of Aššur, and nothing more than that.

The same limited meaning of the term *Aššurāyū* is characteristic of other uses of the category, too. In one text, a body of *Aššurāyū* features as a collective.[684] Even so, the presence of the governor of Aššur and the fact that the term *Aššurāyū* is preceded by the sign for a city demonstrates that the people of the city are meant, and not some broader category. The same is true of a text that refers to the *maddatte ša aššurāyē* (obligation of the Assyrians).[685] This

[684] KAV 217: 10 and 16 refer to URU ^{d}*aššurāyū*, and KAV 217: 13 refers to an individual URU ^{d}*aššurāyu*. For an edition of the text see Freydank 1992: 224-225. The text is discussed in Freydank 1992 and Postgate 2014: 13-14.
[685] VAT 16398 (MARV 1.49): 4-5, edited in Freydank 1976. See also MARV 6.42.

obligation appears in the context of contributions to the *ginā'u* agency in the Aššur temple, and is clearly a reference to inhabitants of the province of Aššur rather than to a more semantically specific category.[686] There is an administrative text that speaks of *aššurāyē munnabdī ša ina māt Karduniaš innabiddūnenni* (fugitive Assyrians, who fled from the land Karduniaš).[687] The context of this passage is a war between Assyria and Babylonia, and it is likely that these Assyrians are soldiers fleeing after some military misfortune. Either way, the sense conveyed is that of political association with the Assyrian kingdom.

Finally, and as mentioned in the previous section, *Aššurāyū* appear in numerous texts from the complex Assyrian West, where they are opposed to various other groups. In texts from Dūr-Katlimmu and Ḫarbe, this categorization is primarily applied to individuals. It is possible to account for these isolated Assyrians in the West as people who have come from the Assyrian heartland, likely in the context of government service. Amid the diversity of the social landscape in the West, it can at times be relevant to point out that this or that person has some relationship with the Assyrian heartland. What that relevance might be is not clear. The Assyrian category is only applied to a large body of people in texts from Tell Sabi Abyad. But again, these Assyrians appear to be direct transplants from the Assyrian heartland. Building on other usages of the category, the Assyrians of Tell Sabi Abyad should be identified with the

[686] See Gauthier 2016: 569-571 for the interpretation of this text as referring to a multiplicity of individual Assyrians, in which Assyrianness is clearly a function of geography.
[687] VAT 18068 (MARV 4.30): 16-17, edited in Llop 2010a: 110-111.

population of farmers that lived alongside (and was about equal in size to) the resident *šiluḫlu*s.[688] The disparate origins of these populations is reflected both in their names and in their status.[689] In contrast to the *šiluḫlu*s, farmers are allotted land[690] and bear Assyrian names. This suggests that Assyrians were brought to Tell Sabi Abyad to help increase the local population and its agricultural output, providing a firmer foundation for Assyrian government. Contemporaneous references to Assyrians in texts from Tell Sabi Abyad therefore distinguish a group that was different in terms of provenance, with all the relevant implications. This is as close to "ethnic" as the Assyrian social category comes. This is also a highly particular context in which different populations are being brought together and none seems to be sufficiently predominant to function as normative. Further, many *šiluḫlu*s elsewhere have good Assyrian names, so that the situation in Tell Sabi Abyad must be regarded as the product of local circumstance, and not as the strict alignment of the Assyrian category with a social station.[691] It is not clear if the Assyrian category maintained any salience beyond the first generation of

[688] See Wiggermann 2000: 191 for the estimated population of roughly 400 farmers, 400 *šiluḫlu*s, and 60 officials with their families.
[689] See Wiggermann 2000: 189: "Besides the *šiluḫlu* and the chief farmers, there is another group of agricultural workers, the farmers. Two texts of the Ili-pada/Tammitte period, apparently duplicates but neither of them completely preserved, contain a list of 100 men, all with their father's name added. This, and the fact that practically all names are good Assyrian, distinguishes them from the *šiluḫlu* (never father's name, usually foreign names), and confirms their social status as free-born dependents."
[690] As indicated by the fact that they do not receive rations, and must therefore meet all of their own nutritional needs themselves. See Wiggermann 2000: 181.
[691] As noted in Jakob 2003: 39.

settlers, or indeed if any social importance attached to being Assyrian in its own right, rather than because of its local, circumstantial (and presumably transient) connection to status.

Scattered references to *Aššurāyū* in sources written outside of the Assyrian kingdom do not alter the general picture. A number of 14th century indentured servitude agreements have been recovered among the texts written in Nuzi before its conquest by Aššur-uballiṭ. In these agreements, individuals surrender their freedom in exchange for the security of a servile position in someone else's house. Three of the Nuzi agreements are related to Aššur: one concerns Attilammu, who is described as an *Aššurāyu*,[692] while the other two concern men who are described as *ša māt Aššur* (of the land of Aššur).[693] Despite the different expressions, they all seem to indicate only the provenance of the people involved. They come in some capacity from an area known as the land of Aššur. Another dimension of the association with Aššur can be gleaned from two further references to *Aššurāyū* in Nuzi texts. These references depict *Aššurāyū* as the perpetrators of destructive raids in the general area of Nuzi.[694] Assyrians are therefore not simply those with a geographical relationship to the land of Aššur, but also those associated with the eponymous polity. This reading is reinforced by Nuzi texts that document the distribution of supplies. Among the recipients of supplies are *ubārūtu ša māt Aššur* (official

[692] JENu 919: 1-2, edited as text 5 in Maidman 2010: 26-27.
[693] JENu 942 and JENu 157a+157c, edited as texts text 6 and 7 in Maidman 2010: 28-30; the second text describes the person becoming an indentured servant more specifically as a *ḫapiru ša māt Aššur* (a person of the *ḫapiru*-class from the land of Aššur). On the term *ḫabiru*, see von Dassow 2008: 105-111, as well as the Tikunani Prism edited in Salvini 1996: Chapter 1. The Tikunani Prism is a list of 438 *ḫabiru*s whose names have different linguistic origins, suggesting a classification unrelated to linguistic background.
[694] JENu 696: 2 and SMN 3266, edited as texts 13 and 16 in Maidman 2010: 39-42 and 47-48 respectively.

visitors from the land of Aššur).[695] Indentured servants can be referred to either as Assyrian or as from the land of Aššur, and the same applies to those who act on behalf of the Assyrian polity. Overall, the Nuzi texts attest to a usage of the term *Aššurāyū* that is completely analogous to the usage of the "Kassite" category in Middle Assyrian texts. Like the Kassites, Assyrians in Nuzi are simply people associated with a particular territory, be it because they come from there, are the subjects of the polity that governs it, or some other factor or combination of factors that tie them to it. Beyond that, there is no sense of a clearly demarcated social category that is otherwise differentiated from others.

In the Syrian city of Emar, two texts include individuals named Aššurāyu (Assyrian). Both Aššurāyus in Emar are the fathers of sons with local names, Zū-Ba'la and Izra'-Dagan.[696] Izra'-Dagan features as an overseer of people with service obligations, so he was clearly a person of consequence in Emar. Whatever the name Aššurāyu tells us about those who bore it, it had no observable impact on their situation or on that of their sons. The only indication of Assyrianness is the name itself. The closest we get to Assyrianness being a relevant category outside of Assyria is in a fragmentary Middle Assyrian text.[697] The protagonist in the text appears to have run into some trouble while he was in a place beyond Assyrian control. He is made to declare

[695] See SMN 3268: 13, SMN 3272: 12, and SMN 3505: 3-4, edited as texts 2-4 in Maidman 2010: 21-26.
[696] See RE 7: 2 and 25 in Beckman 1996b: 11-12 for Aššurāyu the father of Zū-Ba'la, and RE 78: 2 and 27 on page 99 for Aššurāyu the father of Izra'-Dagan.
[697] Another possible case in which Assyrianness is relevant outside of Assyria is suggested by Faist 2001: 119, footnote 62. Faist interprets MARV 3.2 as documenting the redemption of Assyrian slaves, but there is no textual indication that the people being purchased/redeemed are Assyrian in any way.

that *aššurāyu anākūma* (I am an Assyrian),[698] and is then able to flee and return to Assyria. The state of the text does not permit a fuller reconstruction of events, or a better sense of how the events relate to each other. Nevertheless, the declaration of Assyrianness looks like a claim to political belonging. The protagonist is stating that he is Assyrian, so it might not be wise to treat him poorly lest such treatment incur the wrath of the kingdom. In this text, being Assyrian seems to be a claim to the protection of the Assyrian polity. There is no other discernible relevance to Assyrianness, and no other sense of what Assyrianness might denote.

The usage of the Assyrian category in our evidence conveys no positive semantic content beyond the political and geographical.[699] But this does not necessarily mean that it had no such content. Aššur and its hinterland will, like every place, have produced its own patterns of speech and manner, outlook and style. Some of these may have been embedded in the Assyrian category, though there is no reason to believe that they attached to provenance rather than to class and social position. There is thus no compelling basis for us to assume that such qualities were thought of as Assyrian per se. Assyrianness might instead be linked to the god Aššur. We have already seen that the *ginā'u* offering united the provinces of the Assyrian kingdom in the common provisioning of the Aššur temple.[700] We have also seen that many

[698] The text is MARV 3.63, edited in Postgate 2014: 13. Line 9 is cited here, but line 10 reproduces a semantically identical if grammatically different statement of Assyrianness: *aššurāyu anākūni*.
[699] This aligns with the four proposed readings of *aššurāyū* of Postgate 2014: 106.
[700] Maul 2017: 345-346 regards precisely this as the foundation of an Assyrian identity: "among the willing, an Assyrian is he who, whatever his social or geographic background, participates in the care of the deity that carries the name of the land of Ashur and whose sustenance the Assyrian king has to guarantee. The path that leads from an 'offering community' to a supranational political community of the Assyrian people is laid out here." While this

*šiluḫlu*s with non-Assyrian names in Dūr-Katlimmu gave their children names with the divine element Aššur. This suggests conformity with broader practice, as Aššur is the most common divine element in Middle Assyrian onomastics.[701] A shared appreciation of the god Aššur was, accordingly, a possible foundation for the coming together of the different subjects of the Assyrian kingdom. Aššur was, after all, the patron god of the kingdom.[702] Those who identified with the royal mission looked to Aššur as their patron; those who were the reluctant subjects of the kingdom were nonetheless aware that it was the awesome power of Aššur that had brought about their subjection. Whatever one's personal inclinations, there was no doubt that Aššur was a powerful god worthy of reverence. Such reverence, however, is not unique to Assyrian subjects or to Assyrians as a category. There are other minor polities, particularly from the 12th century onward, who appear to have modelled themselves on Assyria and to have replicated on a smaller scale Assyria's allegiance to Aššur.[703] Yet this did not make them

might be the ideological intent of the *ginā'u* offering, there is scant indication that this was also its effect in the Middle Assyrian period.

[701] See Saporetti 1970b: 177-200; see also Saporetti 1970a: 98-149 for a now outdated list of names incorporating the divine element Aššur. The popularity of this divine element is likely magnified by the fact that the people represented in our texts are drawn disproportionately from the higher social strata and from the region of Aššur. Even so, the divine element Aššur is broadly attested in names from all social strata and all parts of the kingdom.

[702] The universal appeal of the deity is apparent in the reorganization of his temple complex, as per Cancik-Kirschbaum 2011: 74: "é.kur 'house of the land', the name of the sanctuary of Enlil at Nippur was assigned to the temple of Ashur; by integrating small chapels for the great gods within the Ashur-temple, the building became é.šar.ra 'house of entirety.'"

[703] See Cancik-Kirschbaum 2013: 456: "With the very beginning of the 12th century, elements of a new organisational pattern can be observed at the western margins of the empire. In the Ḫābūr area and further to the West small political entities appear, obviously in some way semi-autonomous but on the other hand linked to the Assyrian empire. They were headed by rulers with Assyrian names building royal palaces, founding new cities, setting up royal inscriptions, who did acknowledge the king of Assur as their overlord." For the inscriptional record of these minor kingdoms, see Maul 1992, Maul 2005, and Shibata 2012. For an interpretation that connects these kingdoms to "renegade" Assyrian subjects, see Brown 2013: 115.

Assyrian. It is also possible to look to state service as a great unifier of the people of the Assyrian realm. From slaves and *šiluḫlu*s to small landholders and grandees, Assyrian subjects participated jointly in the state economy. The result was that the social world was framed by the demands of the prevailing system. J.N. Postgate describes this situation as follows:

> *there was an apparatus of government which formed its own dynamic, over and above any of the pre-existing social structures round which the governing power was formed. It was a powerful force for conformity, in a way which we are all familiar with; and as today, it is the demands and constraints of the 'system' which dictate the day-by-day reality of living for most of the population in their relationship to the state*.[704]

Even if the lives of Assyrian subjects were shaped by the Assyrian system, the experience of that system varied wildly depending on one's social position. There was no common ground in the ways a grandee and a slave participated in the life of the kingdom. This is not a solid foundation on which to foster Assyrianness, and it is unlikely to have generated any sustained identification with the Assyrian category. This is as true for those at the bottom of the social hierarchy as it is for those at the top.[705] The privileges of the grandees of the Assyrian kingdom

[704] Postgate 2010: 34.

[705] Cf. the conclusion of Feldman 2006: 37 in the context of a tomb from Aššur: "Thus, what can be identified as the intentional assemblage of both internationalizing and assyrianizing works of art in the family tomb of a high official should signal a dynamic process of Assyrian identity formation." Identity formation perhaps, but not necessarily under the aegis of the Assyrian category.

were not dependent on identifying with the Assyrian category. Instead, they derived from wealth, status, and service to the king. Your name didn't have to be Aššurāyu for any of that.

4.5 The Assyrian Social Category in the Middle Assyrian Period

The transition from the Old to the Middle Assyrian period brings with it a transformation of the central institutions of Assyrian life. Gone is the *ālum*, that deliberative body that represented the collective interests of the Assyrian social category. In its place is the lonely figure of the king, who occupies a position elevated far above the doings of ordinary human beings. Just as the *ālum* is supplanted by the king, so too is the god Aššur's function as the symbolic embodiment of the Assyrian community supplanted by his personal relationship with the king. Aššur is no longer simply the civic god of a city and the community identified with it, but chief among all the gods, a god whose power extends over the whole world and commands the obeisance of all of humanity. He is the Assyrian Enlil. Through the Assyrian king – his chosen agent – the god Aššur asserts his mastery over creation. The universal aspirations of Aššur are epitomized by the divine commandment that Assyrian kings should expand their land. Aššur has outgrown his city: *āl Aššur* (the city of Aššur) makes way for *māt Aššur* (the land of Aššur).

The reconstruction of the Assyrian polity has profound social consequences. Without an *ālum*, the concept of Assyrians as a community of equals – the *mer'ū Aššur* (children of Aššur) – has lost its institutional anchor. In its place is the category *Aššurāyū* (Assyrians). There are consistent patterns in the usage of the term *Aššurāyū* in Middle Assyrian sources. These

patterns apply across textual genres, time, and political space. We encounter Assyrians as people who are somehow related to the city of Aššur or its hinterland. Although it is possible that this conveys certain expectations about cultural practice, this does not emerge from any of our texts. We also encounter Assyrians as people who are subjects of the Assyrian king, albeit less frequently and more ambiguously. When the king sends out armies or messengers, these can be viewed as "Assyrian" regardless of how they might be seen in a different context. Beyond these narrow usages, the Assyrian category has no apparent meaning. The lack of further semantic specification in the use of the term *Aššurāyū* accords well with the fact that people designated as Assyrian derive no known benefit from this categorization. There is no observable preferential treatment of Assyrians in any Middle Assyrian texts.[706] Indeed, the Assyrian kings themselves express no special relationship with *Aššurāyū* and make no claim to be their agent. Ideologically, the king is, like the god Aššur, bigger than the geographically circumscribed Assyrians. They are but one group among his subjects.

Categories like *Aššurāyū* had little purchase in the Middle Assyrian social world. Such categories could have organizational value in specific contexts, but did not resonate widely beyond them. This is because the organization of the social space was based in other kinds of categories, relating to individual status, rank, and wealth. What mattered was whether you were a *šiluḫlu*, whether you were a landholder, whether you served the king: it was these sorts

[706] Jakob 2005: 185 reaches a comparable conclusion.

of categories that were the sources of social capital, and being Assyrian had no bearing on any of them. This is manifest in the rigidity of social boundaries. There seems to have been absolutely no way for a *šiluḫlu* to have become a landholder, let alone a grandee. Society was highly stratified and there is no apparent movement between strata, except for down. This rigidity highlights the extent to which these categories are bound up with the distribution of capital. Those at the top guard theirs jealously, and shut the door behind them. Unlike in the Old Assyrian period, there is no equivalent policing of boundaries between Assyrians and non-Assyrians. On the contrary, there is every indication that to the extent that such boundaries existed, they could be crossed at will. Why would anyone bother policing them if standing on one side or the other was without consequence?

5. Conclusion

lā īde nišī u mātāma

He knows not a people, nor even a country.

- *Gilgamesh i 108*[707]

ἀλλ᾽ εἰ χεῖρας ἔχον βόες <ἵπποι τ᾽> ἠὲ λέοντες

ἢ γράψαι χείρεσσι καὶ ἔργα τελεῖν ἅπερ ἄνδρες,

ἵπποι μέν θ᾽ ἵπποισι βόες δέ τε βουσὶν ὁμοίας

καί <κε> θεῶν ἰδέας ἔγραφον καὶ σώματ᾽ ἐποίουν

τοιαῦθ᾽ οἷόν περ καὐτοὶ δέμας εἶχον <ἕκαστοι>.

Now, if cattle and horses and lions had hands

and could draw with those hands and create things as humans do,

horses like horses and cattle like cattle

would draw the forms of the gods, and fashion their bodies

just like the bodies they themselves have.

- *Xenophanes, Fragment 32*[708]

[707] Gilgamesh i 108 in George 2003: 544.
[708] Xenophanes Fragment 32 in Graham 2010: 108-111.

We began with Iddin-Aššur and Aššur-iddin. These two men, at either side of the second millennium BCE, share more than their names. They are united in their close relationship to Aššur; they are in some way Assyrian. What does that mean? In the preceding chapters, we laid the foundation for answering this question. First, we developed a new theoretical framework through which to make sense of categories like "Assyrian". This is the social categories approach. The underlying premise of this approach is that all social groups share a fundamental operational likeness. It matters whether groups are organized along principles of race, gender, or class, but the social function of all such divisions is the same: they structure the social space in ways that create imbalances in the distribution of power. Social groups can, accordingly, be analyzed productively as manifestations of the same phenomenon, rather than as iterations of particular forms of social differentiation. This dispenses with the need to force groups into analytical typologies that translate poorly across different contexts, and thereby facilitates comparative research. The social categories approach identifies the categories that exist within a social world and investigates how they relate to each other, examining them within their own contexts and on their own terms. It offers a theory of how social categorization works, how such categories can give rise to collective identities, and how they can be used to identify the primary cleavages and structural inequalities in any social system. This is a universal framework for the study of social groups that recognizes their essential unity.

In the Old Assyrian period, the Assyrian category was rooted in the city of Aššur. This city had a collective form of government, which is manifest in the *ālum*, the city assembly that was its sovereign organ. As Aššur's primary decision-making body, the *ālum* was the nexus of power. Here, the leading residents of Aššur came together to make decisions for the city as a whole, as well as to administer most of its affairs. Excepting only the hereditary position of the city's titular ruler, high office rotated among leading citizens. The ability to participate in this complex of government was the foundation of the Assyrian social category. In order to participate, one had to be a free, adult male from one of the established families of Aššur. This confluence of status and kinship was the basis of Assyrianness. It excluded both servile residents of the city and those who were not part of the recognized kinship structure. Aššur was the focal point of a large trading network that brought about the movement of many Assyrians to various cities and towns in Anatolia, where they formed permanent communities. This mercantile diaspora reproduced the institutions of Aššur, establishing assemblies and importing the symbols of their home city's eponymous god. The Assyrian presence in Anatolia was regulated by agreements with local rulers, who granted privileges to Assyrians on the basis of their membership in the Assyrian category. Although Assyrians and local Anatolians came together in various ways, the mercantile diaspora preserved its institutional autonomy and categorical distinctiveness

Assyrianness was a valuable status both in Aššur and in Anatolia. In Aššur, it was the gateway to participation in the civic life of the city, setting apart those with access to the levers of power from those without. In Anatolia, Assyrianness was the sine qua non of participation in those economic activities that were the foundation of the Assyrian presence. Membership in the Assyrian category was intimately bound up with access to social capital. As a result, the category was closed to outsiders and had rigid, impermeable boundaries. Assyrians were clearly differentiated from non-Assyrians, and there were no apparent channels through which to bring in male outsiders. Category boundaries sealed off the social capital that inhered in Assyrianness and hoarded it for established members. While Assyrians set themselves apart from non-Assyrians, there was an ideology of equality among category members. This is expressed in the very term that Assyrians used to describe their status, namely *mer Aššur* – son of Aššur. To be Assyrian was to be a member of a community of equals who came together to administer their affairs collectively and to share in the benefits of their category.

The social landscape of the Middle Assyrian period is altogether different. The supremacy of the collaborative *ālum* makes way for the supremacy of the king, who rules with the support of a small upper class. Likewise, the city-state of Aššur and its mercantile diaspora make way for the land of Aššur, the realm of an expansionist kingdom that comes to encompass the entirety of northern Mesopotamia. Along with a changed political landscape comes a change in the social structure. In this new environment, the Assyrian category

designates the people of Aššur in a broad sense: Assyrians are people from the city of Aššur or from associated territories along the Tigris. This categorization can persist when Assyrians move away from the Assyrian heartland and is unconnected to status or kinship. It is logical to infer that the Assyrian category has some cultural and linguistic associations, though these are not the focus of any attention in surviving sources. Another usage of the Assyrian category designates subjection to the Assyrian king. The king's realm retains its connection to the city and especially to the god Aššur, so that anyone who serves the king or is subject to his rule can be identified as Assyrian in relevant contexts. In the Middle Assyrian dispensation, social capital inheres not in membership in a civic community, but is concentrated instead in a superstratum of elite families who administer the far-flung territories of the Assyrian king. This superstratum is not congruent with the Assyrian category, which no longer manifests any sort of privileged relationship with social capital. In the absence of inherent advantages, Assyrianness has no real added value. As a result, its boundaries disintegrate. Assyrianness becomes a permeable category, open to outsiders. The children of Aššur are no more, making way for the inchoate *Aššurāyū* – a motley crew of people from a certain geographical area, or servants of the Assyrian king.

Examining the Assyrian social category at two different points in history demonstrates that it was not static. On the contrary, the form and functioning of the category is as radically transformed as is the social context in which it features. Different social worlds produce very

different Assyrian categories. In the Old Assyrian period, Assyrianness is bound up with social capital and thus closed off; in the Middle Assyrian period, it is untethered from social capital, and thus free from rigid boundaries. What, then, does it mean to say that Iddin-Aššur and Aššur-iddin were Assyrian? Two very different things. Membership in the Assyrian category was the central organizing principle of the Old Assyrian social world of Iddin-Aššur. He was in the first instance a son of Aššur, and he was bound to his fellow category members in ties of solidarity and cooperation. In the Middle Assyrian social world of Aššur-iddin, by contrast, Assyrianness was incidental. Aššur-iddin's place in the world was defined by membership in the elite. Yes, he was a subject and servant of the Assyrian king, and yes, he likely had cultural and linguistic affinities with the Assyrian heartland, but he was more closely bound to fellow grandees without such cultural and linguistic affinities than he was with any Assyrian peasant.

To describe Assyrians in both the Old and Middle Assyrian periods as an ethnic group is to say nothing at all. Arguments could be made that Assyrians in both periods conform to this or that definition of ethnicity. But this would conceal immense differences in the construction of the category, its salience, its permeability, and its relationship to the distribution of power. The social categories approach does away with classificatory disputes and instead draws attention to precisely such questions. Applied to the Assyrian evidence of the second millennium BCE, it demonstrates that there was significant diachronic change. At different moments, the Assyrian category occupied different social locations and designated different

subsets of the population according to different criteria. The social categories approach reveals the diachronic transformation of categories that are otherwise so prone to interpretation as persistent, static ethnicities. There are no such things. Iddin-Aššur and Aššur-iddin were both Assyrian, but they would have had some trouble comprehending each other's Assyrianness.

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